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THE LIFE  
OF  
KING ALFRED.

By DR. REINHOLD PAULI.

A TRANSLATION REVISED BY THE AUTHOR.



EDITED BY  
THOMAS WRIGHT, Esq., M.A., F.S.A.

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## PREFACE OF THE EDITOR.

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AMONG the great historical personages of the Middle Ages, few stand out in bolder relief than Alfred, the West-Saxon. While he may be compared in many respects with Charlemagne, although not equal with him in the extent of his power, or in the glory of empire, yet he was superior to him so far as the saviour of his own people must always be regarded as greater than the conqueror of others. He had fallen on the evil days of his country, and this circumstance perhaps helped to increase the contrast between the active and intelligent mind of the King and the moral and intellectual darkness with which he was surrounded. Alfred found learning dead, or nearly so, and he restored it at least to life; the laws were almost powerless, till he gave them force; the church was debased, and he raised it; the land was ravaged by a fearful enemy, from which he delivered it. It was an age in which it was not easy for the energies of an individual to effect such reforms, and we might be

inclined to suppose that history had exaggerated the picture, were it not for those lasting memorials, his own writings, which show us that he possessed a mind far in advance of the time in which he lived. Nevertheless, in whatever light we regard him, we shall find in everything that he was rather a restorer than a creator. Although a great warrior, he was not an ambitious one, and there was nothing aggressive in his policy, no indication of a desire to extend the limits of his rule. He did not seek to be the founder of an empire. His laws are only those by which his subjects had been ruled under former kings, newly arranged and compiled. In church matters he followed the example of his predecessors in profound reverence for the see of Rome, though perhaps with less of bigotry. Even in literature, he was but a translator; and in what he did for the encouragement of learning, he only went with a stream which had already set in.

There was a spirit of nationality among the Anglo-Saxon people, which led them to love their own language and to cherish its literature, and with this spirit Alfred was identified from his youth. The clergy throughout the Middle Ages regarded the Latin language as the only representative of learning, and they looked with a jealous eye at all attempts at transferring knowledge to the vulgar tongue. It was the national spirit alluded to that in Alfred's time had led to the neglect of the Latin tongue, and, while the King was complaining of this

neglect, he was actually showing his own leaning to the spirit which had caused it, by translating books from Latin into Anglo-Saxon. Nor must we disguise from ourselves that, with all Alfred's great qualities, the circumstance which gave him most celebrity, and which caused his countrymen to be so long and so warmly attached to his memory, was that of his having become, for the sake of his country's freedom, a homeless wanderer in the woods, exposed to all the adventures and dangers of the ordinary outlaw. Our Anglo-Saxon forefathers had a peculiar attachment to the character of the outlaw, and they loved to trace their heroes in such adventures as were said to have befallen the King in the wilds of Athelney.

The want of a really good life of Alfred in the English language was much to be regretted. The materials, it is true, are scanty, and many of them of very doubtful value; yet, with a sound critical mind to sift, compare, and make inductions, much might be done towards picturing the great King as he really thought and acted. This has been attempted by Dr. Pauli, and I think with success, and the following pages merit well to be laid before the English reader in the language which we derive immediately from that which Alfred spoke. If we have any fault to find with the manner in which our Author treats his subject, it is that, in his admiration of his hero, he has unintentionally adopted too much of the style of the panegyrist; that on one

side he shows a sort of chivalrous sensitiveness at the slightest incident which would intimate the possibility of casting a blot, however small, on the object of his adoration, while on the other it is evident that he gives up with great reluctance even a palpable fable if it tends to enhance his glory. These are weaknesses which are easily forgiven, and they detract very little indeed from the value of the book now ushered into the presence of the English public.

I have just observed that the materials for the "History of Alfred" are scanty, compared with its importance. They consist chiefly of the concise narrative of the "Anglo-Saxon Chronicle," which was composed, at all events, not later than the following century, and the authority of which no one can reasonably doubt. After this comes the celebrated "Life of Alfred," professing to be composed by his Bishop, Asser. A few years ago, I stated some reasons which led me to suspect the authenticity of this book, but the opinion I had thus put forth, was controverted first by Dr. Lingard, and now again by Dr. Pauli. I confess that my own suspicions on the subject are not at present diminished, but in this place I would wish to abstain from controversy.

As I have already intimated, it is with much pleasure that I introduce the translation of Dr. Pauli's "Life of Alfred" to the English reader. It is but justice to myself to say, that it was placed in

my hands to edit, as it was passing rapidly through the press ; but, if I had had more time, I do not think that I could have made it more acceptable to the reader than it will be for its own merits. As the Author states in his preface, it was written for Germany ; and in revising it I have added a few notes on matters which seemed to me to require explaining to English readers ; and, for the same reason, I have taken the liberty of altering the orthography of many of the names. Alfred, Edward, and such proper names, have become part of our language ; there can be no doubt that Anglo-Saxons would have written them *Ælfred*, *Eadweard*, &c., but there is no more reason for our printing them so in a modern English book, than there would be for printing *æfter* for *after*, *eall* for *all*, and the like. Several recent English antiquaries have, it is true, introduced the practice of giving such names in their old orthography, but it is at best but a piece of learned pedantry, and is calculated only to make the book repulsive to the general reader ; which appears not to be the case in Germany. On the whole. I fear I have hardly carried my alterations in this respect far enough, for I have allowed one or two names that occur in the notes to retain their old orthography, as they seem to be quoted like the titles of books.

THOMAS WRIGHT.

LONDON, MAY 1852.





THE LIFE  
OF KING ALFRED.



TO  
HIS EXCELLENCY DR. C. C. J. BUNSEN,  
PRIVY COUNCILLOR AND  
AMBASSADOR OF HIS MAJESTY THE KING OF PRUSSIA,  
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED.



## PREFACE.

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THE following Work was planned at Oxford, in the November of the eventful year 1848, at a time when all German hearts trembled, as they had seldom done before, for the safety of their Fatherland; and, more especially, for the preservation of that particular state which Providence has chosen to be the defence and safeguard of Germany. On my first receiving intelligence of the state of things at home, I felt, on many accounts, great dissatisfaction at being abroad; and the only thing capable of dispelling for a few hours my sorrowful reflections, was my daily visit to the ancient and venerable Bodleian Library, which is so rich in literary treasures of all kinds; and, more especially, in manuscripts. Despite of every other consideration, however, the history of the sufferings and victories of Alfred the West-Saxon, derived immediately from the original authorities themselves, wound itself insensibly around my heart.

I resolved on selecting the Life of this most excellent Prince as the starting-point for my future

researches in English History, in which department of literature a wide field has lately been opened for my exertions, in consequence of the prospect I have of continuing Lappenberg's "History of England," as that distinguished author has been compelled, by a severe affection of the eyes, to give up the idea of completing it himself.

The preparatory studies for my work on Alfred were rapidly progressing, when circumstances occurred to prevent my continuing them, and did not allow me to proceed with the work itself before the following Autumn. At length, however, after many interruptions, some of them for a considerable period, the book is finished. Almost two years have passed away since it was commenced, and still are the eyes of the whole world fixed, although with different feelings, on the settlement of matters in our German Fatherland.

It has been my constant aim to paint, to the best of my abilities, the high moral position which Alfred occupies in the organic development of free England, and to this end I have always, speaking with a due regard to the present state of historical research in Germany, had recourse to those sources which are most worthy of credit. On looking through my work, I am aware that it contains many grave defects, which I have found it impossible to remedy. They consist, partly in the dangerous attempt to combine pure research with a narration of what has really taken place, and partly in my own

unskilfulness to make up for the paucity of my authorities by a more practised style. In the article of criticism, also, I know that I am not free from fault; but this must be attributed to the fact of my judgment being swayed by a partiality for the object of my remarks, and not to idle carelessness: consequently, I await, with confidence, the decision of every just and upright judge.

As a German, I have written this book principally for Germans, and, I hope, in strict accordance with the true spirit of German research. What I owe to the learning of my countrymen, the reader will find faithfully acknowledged in its proper place. For the main body of the work I am indebted to the native country of the Anglo-Saxon; and I must also acknowledge my thankfulness for the personal friendship of many sound English scholars, such as Kemble and Thorpe, and for the friendly attentions of the officers of the Bodleian Library, the British Museum, and other large libraries.

That I have retained the English mode of writing the Anglo-Saxon, which, however, I derived from the manuscripts themselves, may also be regarded an act of homage to the land of Alfred's birth. To assist me in my labours I either used only such works as were published in England itself, or derived my information from manuscripts whose varied orthography I did not venture to alter to that so logically carried through every possible German dialect by Jacob Grimm. May the great master of this

excellent system pardon me if he should ever perceive that this omission on my part was only occasioned by my desire to advance etymological research ; and that, in many cases, it involved a question of tacitly throwing a new light upon the idiom of the ninth century.

For everything else, let the book speak for itself.

LONDON, *28th October*, 1850.



“On Englalande eac oft wæron cyningas sigesfæste þurh god. Swa swa we secgan gehyrdon. Swa wæs Ælfred cyning. þe oft gefeaht wið Denan. Oððæt he sige gewann and bewerode his leode.”—Homilia Saxonica, sec. XI. MS. Bibl. Bodl. Junius 23, fol. 114 b.



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# L I F E

OF

## ALFRED THE GREAT.

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### INTRODUCTION.

AT the time when Theoderic the Great raised his empire upon the ruins of Rome, his people had neither attained the tranquillity necessary for the permanent occupation of a country, nor sufficient power of themselves to withstand, for any lengthened period, the influence of the still classic ground of the South. The mighty emigration of nations, also, from east to west, was as strong as ever, and, in little more than a quarter of a century after the conqueror of Odoacer was dead, almost every trace of him and his works had disappeared with the independence of the Goths. Charlemagne, at the head of his Frankish warriors, had conquered for himself the entire sovereignty of Germany, and the imperial crown of the Western Empire : never since his time has any one individual among the Germans been powerful enough to unite so many different races of this great nation under one sceptre. But

although those landmarks of his authority which he himself set up against the Slaves, Moors, and Scandinavians, were afterwards pushed forward rather than drawn back, and his magnificent and vigorous institutions and laws preserved their importance, especially among the Franks, for centuries afterwards, still was his empire for ever divided by his descendants. The influence of Rome, which had now assumed a new form, and was again in the course of development, was not the immediate cause of this; it was rather the impulse felt by the various Germanic nations to separate themselves according to the difference of their races, as well as the geographical nature of the countries in which they had settled, and with that feeling of political independence which they inherited from Charlemagne himself, to form themselves into detached independent states.

Alfred, the West-Saxon, the only English sovereign that ever bore the name of "Great,"\* had infinitely greater hardships to undergo, and, during the principal part of his life, far more serious difficulties to struggle with than any other celebrated sovereign of German origin; but, in spite of all this, and with the most untiring perseverance, he laid the foundation for institutions which have not been destroyed down to the present day, and which form one of the brightest links in the strong chain of the political development of the sturdy Saxon element in the island of Britain; at the same time it is certainly true that the isolated position of the

\* He was first so called after the 16th century.

country in which his subjects had settled, and the natural disposition of the latter, had their share in bringing about this result. It would almost seem as if that branch of the Angles and Saxons which detached itself from the vigorous parent-stem of the continent, gave birth, on the fruitful soil of the island, to healthier shoots in a shorter space of time than the Franks in conquered Gaul, or even the Old Saxons themselves in their own country. Charlemagne's priests and nobles went to study under the Anglo-Saxons; and the learned Alcuin ardently sighed for permission to return from the Frankish court to the Library of the Monastery at York. At the period of Alfred's death, his relation, Henry, the father of Otto the Great, who was destined to transport the imperial authority of Rome to Germany, was a young man, and Christian culture was only beginning to be developed among his Saxon subjects.

If we cast a glance on those three German princes who enjoy the epithet of "Great," it seems as if the historical records of them all had been subjected to the same fate, namely, to be confounded, at an early period, with popular tradition. But what a difference is immediately perceptible! For the nations that spoke the German language, the form of Theoderic soon melted into the vapoury outline of a dim and gigantic hero long celebrated in the ballads of all Germans. Charlemagne became a European hero in German and Celtic poetry as well as in the Romances, although the traces of his historical existence are plain enough, and Einhard

has given all future ages a true picture of his personal characteristics. Alfred's name, on the contrary, has been affected by that kind of mythos alone, which, even now-a-days, is actively employed in obliterating all traces of the lives and deeds of celebrated men for those who look with circumscribed vision upon the page of history. Alfred's praises, too, have been sung in the songs of his people,\* but the old Pagan charm of such songs had long been broken. The church, on the other hand, which was greatly indebted to him, has zealously introduced his person into its legends, and most of the later accounts of him which we have received from the monks were possibly dictated by a spirit of pious fraud in their cells. Who will dare to decide which of these two shells of fiction it is most difficult to break, in order to arrive at the solid kernel of real history that is contained within?

\* See the so-called Proverbs of King Alfred, published by Kemble in his "Solomon and Saturn," 1848, p. 226. [And in Wright and Haliwell's "Reliquiæ Antiquæ," I. p. 170, where they were first printed.]

Alfred,

Englene herd,  
 Englene darling,  
 in Enkelonde he was king.—  
 Alfred he was in Enkelonde a king  
 wel swiþe strong and lussum þing;  
 he was king and cleric,  
 full wel he louede Godes were;  
 he was wis on his word  
 and war on his werke;  
 he was þe wisiste mon  
 þad was in Engelsonde on.



Although Alfred lived at a period when his individuality stood out in bold relief, without being enveloped in the vapoury cloud of fiction, and in a country where, at a very early period, the sober prose of serious actuality excluded the lighter poetry of the South, he was not fortunate enough to possess among his followers a Cassiodorus or an Einhard.

At the first glance we might feel inclined to compare Asser with the last-named historian, but if we take the trouble to examine the "*Gesta Ælfredi*" a little more carefully, we are assailed by one doubt after another, as to whether the work in question can, in the form it has been transmitted to us, really be the production of that bishop who was so intimate a confidant of his king. Again and again has criticism tried its strength against this little performance, without being able to come to a decision on this important question. Far be it from me to undertake such a task in its full extent ;

And Layamon's "*Brut*," ed. Sir Fr. Madden, 1848, I. p. 269 :

Seoððen þe æfter  
 Monie hundred wintre  
 Com Alfred þe king,  
 Englelondes deorling,  
 and wrat þe lagen on Englis, etc.

Both poems belong to the commencement of the 13th century, when the English people, in their first struggles for the establishment of their constitution, entrenched themselves once more behind the Saxon element, and, no doubt, found great pleasure in calling to mind the supporters of their ancient greatness. [The two poems alluded to belong to the twelfth century.—Ed.]

indeed, I doubt very much whether it ought, after all, to be treated so unconditionally.

As far as I am aware, no one, with the exception of Th. Wright, in the "*Biographia Literaria Britannica*," I. pp. 405—413, has ever denied the authenticity of the book entirely; on the contrary, the first scholars both of England and Germany have steadfastly maintained that it was really written by Asser, and is one of our best authorities for a life of the great king.\* I do not presume to differ from this opinion; I merely wish to state more particularly what portions of the work appear to me, after mature deliberation, to be genuine, and what portions strike me as interpolations or forgeries.

Unfortunately we do not possess a single good manuscript of the Life; the most ancient one, formerly MS. Cotton. Otho A. XII. and which was as old as the tenth century, was lost in the disastrous fire, by which Sir Robert Cotton's library suffered so greatly in the year 1731. Luckily, however, Wise, in his edition of Asser,† has preserved his collations of the original; and from these we learn that several passages of the other MSS., and especially those which were afterwards the most strongly suspected ones, were not to be found in it. These have been taken from a well known collection, published at

\* In Pertz "*Monum. Hist. Germ.*" I. p. 449, N. 34, Asser is mentioned as "*vitæ Ælfredi auctor coævus.*" Compare Lappenberg's "*Geschichte von England*," I. § XLVIII. p. 311, and Kemble's more recent work, "*The Saxons in England*," II. p. 42, N.

† "*Annales Rerum Gestarum Ælfredi, auctore Asserio Menevensi*," rec. F. Wise, Oxon. 1722, 8.

a later period, under the name of the "*Chronicon Fani S. Neoti, sive Annales Johannis Asserii*," which is nothing more or less than a bad compilation from the "*Saxon Chronicle*," and various legends totally at variance with history. These have found their way into the MS., which was completed very late in the sixteenth century, and into Archbishop Parker's *Editio Princeps*, A. 1574: whether from neglect, or intentionally, is not quite clear.\* Wise's just criticism, however, saved the text of the tenth century.

In addition to this, it is a well known fact, that Florence of Worcester introduced the larger portion of the biography in his "*Chronicle*." It becomes, therefore, necessary immediately to include the latter work in our investigation. At the very outset it must strike the reader as a remarkable circumstance that, though the "*Chronicle*" agrees with the Biography word for word, Asser is not once mentioned as the author's authority; in fact, Florence mentions him only twice altogether, first, when speaking of the year 872, when, on the occasion of Werfrith's elevation to the Bishopric of Worcester, he gives a list, which is greatly out of place, of the learned men who did not shine at Alfred's court till some time afterwards; and, secondly, in the following totally inexplicable notice for the year 883:—"*Assero Scireburnensi episcopo defuncto, succedit Suithelmus*," etc., when we know from Asser himself that it was not until about the year 885 that he first laid the foundation for his future intimacy

\* "*Monumenta Historica Britannica*," Preface, pp. 79, 80.

with the king. We learn from the "Anglo-Saxon Chronicle," also, that Asser, Bishop of Sherburne, did not die before the year 910, and we find his signature appended to genuine documents as late as the year 909.\* We can make nothing of this notice; and all we can do, therefore, is to suppose that it originated in the misapplication of a marginal note.†

It is in vain that we endeavour to discover the motives which induced Florence to pass over in silence the name of the author from whom he copied whole portions of his own work, word for word; perhaps, while taking what materials he thought fit, he did not deem it necessary to allude more particularly to a book that was so well known at the commencement of the twelfth century.‡

But did he entirely follow Asser? Is it not more probable that both he and Asser, when writing the annalistic portions of their works for the years 850 to 887, made use of the same Latin translation, or even the original of the "Saxon Chronicle?" This supposition appears highly probable. It then becomes, however, a matter of doubt whether the purely annalistic portions of Asser's work were not possibly added, at some later period, to the strictly biographical sections of the original *Life*, which have reached us in a somewhat episodic form? According to the Cottonian MS. which was lost,

\* Kemble, "Cod. Diplom." N. 335, 337, 1077, 1082, 1087.

† Compare Thorpe, in his new edition of "Florent. Wigorn.' Chron." I. p. 9.

‡ Florence died July 7, 1118, II. p. 72, ed. Thorpe.

they were there as early as the tenth century, and belonged, therefore, to a much earlier period than that at which Florence wrote, so that this peculiar and uncommon mingling of annals and biography could again have belonged to Asser, and been the original form of his work. Lappenberg\* seems inclined to believe that the annalistic portions must, from certain details, especially in the years 879, 884, 885, 886, 887, be attributed to Asser himself, but the manner in which their purport invariably agrees in every other instance, with that of the chronicles, refutes this opinion at once.

We have more than one good reason for believing that the Anglo-Saxon chronicles, which, according to the most ancient copy that we have, did not begin to be regularly kept under Alfred till a little after the year 890, were at first worked up, after Latin models, from very various sources, and at a time when the necessity of cultivating the language of their native country was more than usually felt by Alfred and his contemporaries. Asser, who was a Welshman, must have understood Saxon. When he was writing the life of his king, in the year 893,† he could consult the chronicles reaching up to 890, but with the first continuation of them, which treats of the latter part of Alfred's life, and which was not compiled until the following century he could not possibly be acquainted. He might certainly have had a Latin edition of the chronicles, from

\* "Göttinger Gel. Anz." Apr. 1, 1844.

† Asser in "Mon. Hist. Brit." p. 492, "a vigesimo ætatis anno usque ad quadragesimum quintum annum quem nunc agit."

which both he and Florence after him might have taken the dates for their general history. But, to my great satisfaction, I think I have remarked that these annalistic dates in both our authors agree, save in a very few cases, with the most ancient copies of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and more especially with the oldest of them at Cambridge, all of which are of West-Saxon origin. Let the reader compare the few following examples which I have selected at random :—

## ASSER. FLORENCE.

## CHRON. SAX.

A. 860. loco funeris dominati  
sunt.

wealstowe gewæld ahton.

A. 874. Cuidam insipienti  
ministro regis.

anum unwisum cyninges  
pegne.

A. 881. finito prælio pagani  
equis inventis equites facti sunt.

þær wearð se here gehorsod  
æfter þam gefeohte.

Again, those passages which are not to be found in the more ancient copies of the chronicles are wanting in Asser also; for instance—

A. 870. The section: “and fordidon ealle þa mynstre,” etc. up to “þa hit wearð to nan þing.”

A. 871. and heora þær wearð oðer ofslegen. þæs nama wæs Sidroc.

A. 877. and se sciphere segelode west ymbutan.

In Florence’s “Chronicle” other elements, also, have penetrated, and we must not conceal the fact that now and then we meet with information that is to be found neither in the earlier chronicles, nor in the “Gesta Ælfredi;” for instance: A. 862, Obitus Sti Swithuni, which is to be found only in

the two latest chronicles, and which, like the account of Asser's death under the year 883, is not old. It is, therefore, difficult to say, whether Florence took the annals of the years 850 to 887 from Asser's work, and merely made his own additions, or whether, as is also possible, he derived his information from the same sources, but after Asser had set him the example.

We will now proceed to the biographical portion of the work properly so called. This, as we before remarked, consists, at present, of episodes of various lengths, and which in many places appear imperfect. The following are the principal ones:—

A. 849. The commencement relating to Alfred's descent and birth, taken from the genealogy of the West-Saxons.—Florence, A. 849.

A. 855. Quarrel between Athelwulf and his son Athelbald; the horrible history of Queen Eadburh.—Florence, A. 855.

A. 866. Concerning Alfred's youth and desire for learning.—Florence, A. 871.

A. 867. Dissertation on Northumbria more detailed than in the chronicle.—Florence, A. 867.

A. 868. Alfred's marriage.—Florence, A. 868.

A. 871. A fuller description of the battle of Æscedune.—Florence, A. 871.

A. 878. A fuller description of the battle of Ethandune.—Florence, A. 878.

A. 884. The long section concerning the king's bodily infirmities and his family; and also concerning the learned men at his court.—Florence, A. 871, 872.

Concerning Asser's own position with his prince, and a dissertation on Wales.

A. 887. The long episode concerning Alfred's studies and illness, his cares of state, religious foundations, and love of justice, with which the book terminates.

I must here remark that, in the MS. Cotton., the last section, at least from the words, "*ingeniosam benevolentiam*," as far as "*locupletatim ditavit*" (pp. 491–495), was in a more recent handwriting.

Portions of all these sections are repeated by Florence word for word; sometimes, when they become too long towards the end, he cuts them down, while at others he inserts them under another year, as may be seen in the foregoing table. The introductory phrases to each episode, which are always written in a peculiar style—the genuine text of Asser, I hope—are the only portions that he invariably omits.

P. 473, A. 866. *Sed ut more navigantium loquar, ne diutius navim undis et velamentis concedentes, et a terra longius enavigantes longum circumferamur inter tantas bellorum clades et annorum enumerationes, ad id, quod nos maxime ad hoc opus incitavit, nobis redeundum esse censeo: scilicet aliquantulum autem meæ cognitioni innotuit, etc.\**

\* Compare the exactly similar manner in which he introduces his subject, Æthelweard, IV. p. 514, "*Monum. Hist. Brit.*" "*veluti advecta navis per gurgites undarum longinqua spatia tenet*," etc. Both of them, as true sons of Britain, take their only metaphor from navigation.



P. 484. A. 884. Igitur ut ad id, unde digressus sum, redeam, ne diuturna navigatione portum optatum quietis omittere cogar, aliquantulum, quantum notitiæ meæ innotuerit, etc.

As we might have expected, the account of the ships built by the king in the year 877, is also wanting; nor is it to be found in the MS. Cotton. This passage is certainly open to grave doubts, as, in the desperate state in which he was then situated, Alfred would hardly have thought of a naval expedition against the enemy.

The account was most probably founded on that in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles of a sea-fight in the year 875. In the year 878, Florence omits the entire story of Alfred's residence with the cowherd, which dates from the "*Vita Sti Neoti*," compiled towards the end of the tenth century, and of which only the opening sentences appear to have been contained in the MS. Cotton. Lastly, Florence mentions nothing of the much suspected clause concerning the origin of the University of Oxford in the year 886, which Camden found only in the MS. Savil., where either he himself or some one else had inserted it, out of love for the Alma Mater, and in whose authenticity, especially after what Lappenberg, "*Geschichte von England*," I. p. 339 et seq. has said upon the subject, no man with the least degree of common sense now-a-days believes.

With the exception of these three portions of the work, I am of opinion that the remaining episodes, even judging them principally by the text

itself, are the genuine production of Asser. The story of Queen Eadburh, which is questioned by Wright, p. 409, was to be found in the MS. Cotton. The phrase "*multis habetur incognitum*," may be accounted as a point in favour of Asser. He had lived for a short time only with the West-Saxons, and may be supposed to have previously known but little of the events which had occurred among them more than eighty years before, and he no doubt wrote the account with a double pleasure, having so often heard it, as he particularly remarks, from his veracious king himself.\*

In conclusion, I beg to call the reader's attention to certain separate facts. It certainly remains a matter of mystery why Asser, A. 871, omits the battle of Merton, when we know, from the Anglo-Saxon calendar, that it happened on the 22nd March. The reason why he places the events, which are mentioned in the chronicle under the year 885, a year earlier, is evident from the fact that they are distinctly noticed by the annalists of the Continent as happening in the year 884.† In the year 883, not only do we miss, as was to be expected, the account of the death of Asser, Bishop of Sherburne, but also the account of the embassy to Rome and the East, for which the most ancient chronicles, as well as Florence, are our authority. These are points which can only be explained by the defective condition in which we received the

\* P. 471, "*a domino meo Ælfredo Angulsaxonum rege veridico*."

† Lappenberg, in "*Göttinger Gel. Anz.*" Jan. 1852.

work. The same holds good with regard to the question, why Asser, who himself informs us, p. 492, that he wrote the book in the five-and-fortieth year of the king's age, that is about 893, continues the biography no further than 887? But I look upon this circumstance rather as another proof of the authenticity of the work,\* as there is no mention of the contest which had recommenced with the Danes, and which, especially after the death of King Guthorm-Athelstan, of East-Anglia, A. 890, threatened to break out afresh, but which did not become imminent, or come to a final decision until after 893. From this it is, also, probable that Asser might have used a copy of the "Saxon Chronicle" which closed with the year 887.

Wright, p. 411, is most certainly not warranted in supposing that no part of the life was composed previous to the end of the tenth century, because the translation of St. Neot had taken place in the year 974, and that a life of this saint, from which the pretended work of Asser was derived, could not be written until after that event, and that, moreover, the real author was some monk of St. Neot, who had assumed the name of the well-known friend of the great king. Such an assumption rests entirely upon those passages which have been proved not to be genuine. We must be careful also not to speak, like Mr. Wright, too contemptuously of the style of the little work; we sometimes meet with beauties which no one can deny. I will content myself with calling the reader's attention to

\* Lappenberg, in "Göttinger Gel. Anz." April 1, 1844.

two passages, in both of which there is a description of the king's diligence.

P. 486. *Veluti avis prudentissima, quæ primo mane charis e cellulis consurgens æstivo tempore, per incerta aeris itinera cursum veloci volatu dirigens, super multiplices ac diversos herbarum, olerum, fruticum flosculos descendit probatque quid maxime placuerit, atque domum reportat.*

P. 491. *Velut apis fertilissima longe lateque gronnios interrogando discurrens, multimodos divinæ scripturæ flosculos inhianter et incessabiliter congregavit, queis præcordii sui cellulas densatim replevit.*

Such passages are seldom to be met with in the dry monastic productions of the Middle Ages; they contain sentiments which could only spring from deep natural feeling, and tend to prove that Asser was a man who united the fresh and buoyant temperament of a child of Nature with the spirit of true poetry.

Thorpe, in his translation of "Lappenberg's History," II. p. 326, N. i., is of opinion that those who doubt the authenticity of the book may adduce the expression, *vasalli*, under the year 878 (p. 480), as a point in their favour; but this objection is most satisfactorily disposed of by a document, Kemble, "Cod. Diplom. Anglos." N. 216, which was most certainly written in the year 821, and which contains the following passage:—"Expeditionem cum xii. *vasallis* et cum tantis *scutis*." If we suspect *vasallus* (in MS. Cotton., *fasellus*), we must also suspect the phrase *curtus regis*, which we find three

times, pp. 473, 485, 488, as well as several other specimens of peculiar Latinity, such as *gronnius*, p. 491, *gronnosus*, p. 480, and *cambra*, p. 491. If the reader will consult Du Cange for these words, he will find for most of them still more ancient authorities. The expression, *vasallus*, occurs, as is well known, so far back as in the capitulars of Charlemagne. It is remarkable for us to find in the mouth of this Welshman the name of our nation, *Gentes Theotiscæ*, p. 471.

That it was a Briton—and who else could it be but Asser of Wales?—who was engaged in the composition of the work,\* is evident also from the frequently-recurring addition of the Celtic names of different places to the Saxon and Latin ones:

P. 470. The island of Thanet was called by the Britons *Ruim*.†

P. 475. *Snotengaham* was called *Tigguocobanc*, in Latin, *Speluncarum domus*—all of which is faithfully copied by Florence.

P. 477. *Wilton* is situated on the *Guilou*.

P. 478. *Thornsaetas* were called *Durngueis*.

P. 479. *Eaxanceastre* was called *Cairwise*.

P. 480. *Flumen quod Britannice dicitur Abon*.

P. 481. *Selwudu*, *silva magna*, *Coitmaur*.

P. 482. *Cirencester*, *Cairceri*.

Asser was writing especially for his countrymen.‡

\* In his recent preface to his "*Florent. Wigorn.*" p. vii. N. 3, Thorpe takes this as another proof in favour of Asser.

† Might be taken from Nennius, *Ruichim*, "*Monum. Hist. Brit.*" p. 63.

‡ Lingard, "*History and Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon*

I shall here conclude, for the present, my observations concerning this important little work, which, from its imperfections and peculiarities, has unfortunately been often attacked; but, in the course of the following pages, we shall frequently have occasion to refer to many disputed points, as well as to Asser's own life, which must necessarily be closely connected with that of his king.

We shall confine our remarks to a much smaller compass in speaking of the other authorities consulted for this work; they are those which are available for the entire Anglo-Saxon period, and their value and relation to each other have been most ably shown by Lappenberg in the introduction to his excellent history.

The most ancient and important authority for our purpose is naturally the "Anglo-Saxon Chronicle." We have seen how a portion of the "Gesta Ælfredi" was taken from it.

On comparing the form of the letters contained in the oldest copy we now possess with those of other genuine books of the time of Alfred, and duly allowing for the break which is visible in the manuscript immediately after the year 891, we have not the slightest grounds for doubting that it was written during the last ten years of the king's reign. We have, indeed, every right to suppose that it was at this period that the record of passing events first began to be written in the language of Church," II. p. 426, adduces some excellent arguments against Wright.

the people. Not the least weighty reason for this supposition is, that commencing from about the year 853, or, in other words, soon after Alfred was born, the remarks on each year gradually became longer, and the Chronicle loses more and more its primitive form of a mere calendar. The whole portion, too, containing Alfred's life, is pretty well the same in five of the manuscripts which have reached us, and which in many other instances differ from one another. The only exception is the MS. Cotton. Domitian A. VIII., the most modern but one, which gives the whole period up to about the year 1000, in a very defective and unprecise epitome, written in Saxon and Latin. This epitome is particularly scanty during Alfred's life-time, which is a remarkable circumstance, as it is generally supposed that this manuscript was written in Canterbury. The Cambridge manuscript and the MSS. Cott., Tib. A. VI., and Tib. B. I., all of which can be proved to have emanated from somewhere within the boundaries of the kingdom of Wessex, agree most wonderfully, during the ninth century, in every material point. The MS. Cott. Tib. B. VI. offers, during this period, but very few instances of deviation from the tenor of the others, and follows completely the foregoing ones. This copy, however, which originally came from Worcester, is always one year behind the three more ancient ones; and this appears to have also been the case in our most ancient MS. In this particular it agrees, therefore, with the northern historians, such as Simeon of Durham, whose calculation of time, as Kemble has particu-

larly remarked, is generally more accurate than that commonly used in the South of England.

None of the editions we have yet had of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, not even the most modern one published by the Record Commission, in the "*Monumenta Historica Britannica*," have ever succeeded in placing in a proper light, the peculiarity and relative worth of the various manuscripts written at very different periods, in different places, and in different dialects, nor in giving to the public a text that was worthy of the present state of criticism. We purpose investigating more minutely this remarkable production of the early Middle Ages on some future occasion.

Æthelweard's dry chronicle is nothing more than an early adaptation of the Saxon annals into barbarous Latin. Here and there, however, we perceive signs of some other popular authorities having been laid under contribution. It is very seldom, however, that any portion of his work is especially devoted to Alfred's Life; and it is, certainly, a remarkable fact, that he who was himself a descendant of the royal house of Wessex should, after a lapse of little more than a hundred years, not have seized the opportunity of being somewhat more diffuse where his great ancestor was concerned. No part of his work is so horribly and hopelessly mutilated as the third chapter of the fourth book, in which he treats of Alfred. The last edition of this work, as of the one mentioned before it, is contained in the "*Mon. Hist. Brit.*"

We have already spoken of Florence; an ex-



cellent edition of his works has lately been published for the English Historical Society, by Thorpe. In this edition I believe that we may, in many instances, find the most genuine text of the real Asser.

Simeon of Durham, who, in the compilation of his Chronicle, is much indebted to Florence, gives us, occasionally, some original matter, especially in the year 883, when speaking of the more northern parts of England. His work was last printed in the "Mon. Hist. Brit."

Ingulph, Abbot of Croyland, who is said to have been the Secretary of the Conqueror, relates in the work attributed to him, and which is chiefly filled with matters concerning the history of his monastery, all sorts of stories, selected by him either from mere whim or unauthentic documents: this seems to proceed from his little acquaintance with the authorities at his command. But how was it possible for an Englishman full of Norman prejudices, and during the first fifteen or sixteen years after the Conquest, not to become confused in relating what he had heard of the state of the conquered country more than two centuries previous? It appears, however, by his description of Alfred's horometer, that he had first heard an account of that and then became acquainted with Asser's book. In citing his work we use Sir H. Savile's edition of the "*Rerum Anglicarum Scriptores post Bedam præcipui*," *Francofurti*, 1603.\*

\* [It must not be concealed, that very serious doubts have been thrown on the authenticity of the history which goes under

Henry of Huntingdon has, unfortunately, never yet met with a competent editor, not even in the last edition of his works, published in "*Mon. Hist. Brit.*," although he deserved to do so more than any other English historian of the Middle Ages. The attractive and lively manner in which he writes his descriptions of the various battles is, in all probability, to be attributed to his intimate acquaintance with old popular ballads, and must be noticed with regard to our work, and especially the sea-fight in the year 897.

William of Malmesbury enjoys the reputation of being a writer of a higher class, who knew how to impart a certain charm to the old dry form of the Chronicle by the floridness of his style; his conclusions, however, are far from being always right, and it is impossible to overlook his mistakes. The best edition of the "*Gesta Reg. Angl.*," is that of the English Historical Society, edited by Th. D. Hardy, London, 1840.

Most of the information for which we are indebted to the old French Chronicle, in rhyme, of Geoffrey Gaimar, is taken from the Anglo-Saxon Annals; but the copy of them which the poet used, must have differed now and then from that which has reached us. Besides these, he had other authorities as well. The first edition of his work is to be found in the "*Mon. Hist. Brit.*"

The other historians, such, for instance, as Ailred

the name of Ingulf, and at all events its character is sufficiently suspicious to hinder us from putting faith in statements which are not supported by other evidence.—ED.]

of Rievaulx, Roger of Wendover, Matthew of Westminster, etc., who treat of the Anglo-Saxons, have occasionally been laid under contribution.

Two most important authorities, which are of great assistance for everything connected with the period of which we are writing, are The Laws of Alfred, in Thorpe's excellent edition of the "Ancient Laws and Institutes of England," London, 1840, and Kemble's "Codex Diplomaticus Ævi Saxonici," in which excellent collection, however, the number and genuineness of the manuscripts in the ninth century correspond neither with those of the preceding, nor of the following one.

Of the more recent publications, I am most indebted to the "History of England" by Lappenberg. I found this work, consulted simultaneously with the translation of it executed by Thorpe, and enriched with additional matter both by him and the author, to be the most beautiful and surest guide in penetrating the labyrinth of early English history. The arrangement of it is one that is, naturally, far from exhausting the Life and Age of Alfred the Great: it leaves sufficient for the biographer to glean a plenteous harvest. The case is exactly the same with regard to Lappenberg's predecessor, the industrious Sharon Turner, and to his successor Kemble, who, in a series of separate essays, contained in his last work, "The Saxons in England," has treated the public and private affairs of the Anglo-Saxons in the most ingenious manner.

The literature of modern times, also, furnishes

us with works especially dedicated to Alfred's life. The title of the first work of this description: "The Life of Alfred or Alvred, the first Institutor of subordinate Government in this Kingdome, and Refounder of the University of Oxford, Together with a Parallel of our Sovereigne Lord, King Charles, untill this yeare 1634," by Robert Powell, London, 1634, is sufficiently indicative of the spirit in which the book is written, and of what is to be learned from it.

At a subsequent period, under the Restoration, the learned Spelman composed a biography of Alfred, of which Hearne published an English edition, with additions of his own, in 1709:\* both these works, however, in spite of the praiseworthy care with which they were written, are very insupportable from the multitude of quotations, in which some later and mere secondary authority, who has not yet had the honour of being printed, is placed on the same and even a higher footing than our best authors. It appears, too, especially in the accounts of the sufferings of Alfred, and of his country, as if the same monkish spirit that animated Oxford in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries influenced her in the seventeenth as well.

Albrecht von Haller was the first German, who,

\* Sir John Spelman, "*Ælfredi Magni Vita*," fol. Oxon. 1678, formerly written in English, and first translated into Latin by Dr. Obadiah Walker, of blessed memory. Spelman's "*Life of Alfred the Great*," published with additions and remarks by Thomas Hearne, Oxf. 1709.

in his book, "Alfred, König der Angel-Sachsen," Göttingen und Bern, 1773, wrote on this subject. He relied implicitly on Spelman for his materials, and purposed to give a picture of moderate monarchy. In addition to this there was also too much imagination and fiction in his book, which would, otherwise, have been readable enough.

A. Bicknell, "Life of Alfred the Great, King of the Anglo-Saxons," London, 1777, proposed to set the diffuse labours of his predecessors before his reader in a more attractive shape: he also treats the affairs of the church, as was the custom of his time, in a very offhand, and even contemptuous tone, but he had not the least idea of original research, and indulges, consequently, in the most arbitrary suppositions.

F. S. Count von Stolberg relates the life of Alfred in his own agreeable manner. He procured the materials for his work (Münster, 1815) from Turner's "History of the Anglo-Saxons," in which the subject was certainly handled for the first time with extraordinary love.

"A History of Alfred the Great," translated from Turner's "History of the Anglo-Saxons," together with the *Lodbrokar-Quida* in the original text, and with a metrical translation by Dr. Friedrich Lorenz, Hamburgh, 1828.

The most recent work, "The Life of Alfred the Great," by the Rev. J. A. Giles, London, 1848, deserves to be mentioned, merely from the fact of its being the last; it is neither distinguished by

sound criticism, nor by a graceful style. It certainly redounds but little to the credit of England, that so excellent a subject as the life of Alfred, "Old England's Darling," has never, even at the thousandth anniversary of Alfred's birth, been treated in a manner befitting its importance.

## SECTION I.

RISE OF THE KINGDOM OF THE WEST-SAXONS.—ITS RULERS DESCENDED FROM WODEN.—FORMER AGES.—EGBERHT.—ATHELWULF.

It certainly furnishes matter for reflections of a peculiar nature to find, on looking into one section of the “Saxon Chronicles” for the year 855, the contents of which had certainly been familiar to the Scops from the earliest times, and which were most probably committed to writing during Alfred’s reign, that the genealogy of the reigning family of the West-Saxons is traced up to Woden, and the most powerful gods.\* Alfred, who, more than any other

\* This curious monument has reached us, in its fullest and least mutilated state, first, in the four most ancient manuscript copies of the chronicle, where the genealogy descends to King Athelwulf, and likewise in a fragment, which is bound up with the MS. Cotton. Tib. A. III., and comes down as late as Edward II. (†987). To judge by the date and the form of the writing, it is quite as old as our second most ancient MS. (Cott. Tib. A. VI.); but there is no absolute necessity for its having formerly belonged to this MS., as some one has supposed, in the Catalogue of the Cottonian Collection; it is far more probable, that it is the remains of some other copy of the Chronicle, which has since been lost. From these documents the genealogy was first taken by Asser, Æthelweard and Florence. Florence has also given us other genealogies besides that contained in his Chronicle. The example of these writers is followed by almost all subsequent historians, but the mutilation and omission of foreign-sounding names increases with each successive historian.

king of the Middle Ages, was devoted with his whole soul to the belief in the eternal truths of the Christian religion, could not and would not prevent his people from remaining thoroughly convinced, as they always had been, of the intimate relation of his royal house with the primitive Pagan divinities. In the most ancient history of the Saxons, as in that of every other nation, gods and heroes were lost in the same kind of dissolving views, being at last looked on as nothing more than old mythic kings. It was not until the confidence in the race of Cerdic, and, with that confidence, the belief in the ancient traditions was destroyed, that foreign conquerors succeeded in placing themselves firmly upon the English throne. These traditions, however, were substantially the same with the Anglo-Saxons as with all the other races of German origin. They all traced their descent up to God, and even named themselves after the gods. This deeply-rooted conviction of their divine origin is, therefore, found among the Goths as well as the Langobards and Scandinavians; in fact, these genealogies, which were preserved and continued with so much care, very often show the same names and the same line of succession among totally different races. Of all these genealogical tables, however, that of the West-Saxon kings is the fullest, and affords a strong proof of the early importance of the race, and of the old legends and expectations which, from the darkest ages, were current respecting it.

It has lately been proved\* that the first place

\* By J. M. Kemble, in his interesting German work: "Ueber



among all the names in these tables belongs to the name of Woden, the sole god, and that by far the greater majority of the others are merely epithets for one and the same divine personage. Some of these latter, however, are of remarkable importance if we go back to the origin of the race from which King Alfred and, although, perhaps, connected by a very slight link, the present sovereign of Great Britain are sprung. We find among them the mythic hero Sceafa, who, being placed in a boat in the midst of the breakers that surround the continent, and being delivered to the mercy of the waves, is tost about by them until he reaches the fabulous island of Scanzia. After Christianity had been established, probably in Alfred's time, the genealogy of the Old Testament, which goes back to Noah and Adam, was brought down to this same Sceafa. We also find the god Beowulf, whose shadow is cast upon the hero of the great Anglo-Saxon Epos, Beowulf Wægmunding. Another name is that of Geat, who is a national god in the mythology of every German race.\* In the account given by Tacitus, the three principal German races spring from the three sons of the divine Mannus; and the demigods were the divine ancestors of the North. The people, therefore, traced their own descent from the gods, as well as that of their kings

die Stammtafeln der Westsachsen," München, 1836, pp. 9, 27. He gives the result of his investigations in his "Treatise on Beówulf," II. p. III.—XXIX. Compare also J. Grimm, "Deutsche Mythologie," pp. 340—342. Second Ed.

\* Kemble, a. a. o. pp. 15, 18, 22.

and heroes. With respect to the latter, the Saxons were fully convinced of their divine origin, long after the light of Christianity had shed its blessings over them. Their Alfred's birth, also, was divine.

The first person of this race, which goes back to the most remote ages, that can lay the least claim to the consideration of the historian, is Cerdic, the founder of the West-Saxon kingdom, although even he is surrounded by the twilight of fable. Not quite fifty years had elapsed since the first arrival of the two brothers, the fabulous heroes, Hengist and Horsa, ere Cerdic, with his son Cynric, landed on the south coast of England, at a place called, in the Chronicle, Cerdicesore.\* Numbers of sea-going hordes of the same race continued to flock after them in unbroken succession for the next ten years. In the place where Port, to whom the legend probably gave the name of the spot itself, set foot on British ground as a victorious combatant, his memory is preserved up to the present time, remaining as a sure geographical proof of the small beginning of that race of princes who were destined gradually to unite the whole southern part of Britain under their sway. Step by step, and conquering in many a bloody fight, did Cerdic and his valiant son strip the Briton, who in vain offered the most desperate resistance, of his land, especially after the arrival, in the year 514, of Stuf and Wihtgar, two nephews of the first conqueror, at the head of reinforcements from home.

Almost from the beginning, the founders of

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 494.

Wessex were distinguished from the rulers of the other Saxon and Anglian kingdoms by their utter and untamable recklessness; they not only fell upon the common foe of all the Germans fighting their way towards the west, namely, the Celts, who were doomed to nearly total destruction, but turned their weapons with as little compunction against those of their own race. In the great emigration of nations, the Jutes also had landed in Kent, in the territory which was afterwards Wessex, and in the Isle of Wight; they formed the first layer, as it were, of the German settlers, on which the Saxon race afterwards rose. Cerdic wrested from them the beautiful island which now guards the entrance to England's greatest port of war, and gave it in fee to his nephews, Stuf and Wihtgar, who, on the father's side, were themselves Jutes.\* When Cerdic died, forty years after his first landing, he had worn the royal crown of the West-Saxon kingdom for sixteen years.† The kingdom at that time embraced the present counties of Hampton, Dorset, and portions of Somerset, which even the heroic King Arthur himself, after in vain resisting the valiant sons of Woden, was compelled to acknowledge.

These are facts which we have no reason to doubt, as they are sufficiently proved by the rapid rise of Wessex. Fable has certainly laid her hand

\* See Lappenberg, "Geschichte von England," I. p. 112.

† It was the battle of Cerdicesford (Charford) which confirmed his royal authority: "Chron. Sax." A. 519, "and siððan ricsadon Westseaxna cynebeorn of pam dæge;" and from that day reigned the royal descendants of the West-Saxons.

on the heroic person of Cerdic, as she has done on that of his British rival. This is sufficiently evident from the figures which have reached us, for Cerdic's forty years' residence on English ground, as well as his sixteen years' rule as crowned king, offers us an instance of the same chronological trickery for a period with which only fiction is acquainted, as that which has already been shown to exist in the dates assigned to Hengist and his successors.\*

This is not the place for enumerating each separate combat on both sides, or for explaining the public and private relations of the conquerors to the conquered Britons; all these topics have long since been satisfactorily discussed by those distinguished historians who have treated the whole of this portion of English history, as far as the generally defective materials at their disposition would admit. The end that we propose to ourselves is, to bring forward more particularly any points in the history of Wessex, when the development of this kingdom strikes out in some new direction, exerting an important influence on its future greatness.

Ceawlin, who succeeded to the sovereignty on Cynric's death, followed, with untiring perseverance, in the footsteps of his predecessors, and after displaying more than ordinary energy in his battles with the Teutons and Britons, rendered Wessex the most powerful among all the neighbouring states. In the year 568, he contended with Athelberht of Kent for the dignity of the Bretwalda;†

\* Lappenberg, p. 72.

† This word does not mean principal King, or supreme Ruler

he remained in possession of the field, and obtained the supremacy over all the other German kings of the island. He then, in innumerable battles, drove back the Briton behind the Severn and the neighbouring mountains of Wales, and it appeared as if the daring conqueror of Wessex was the one selected to unite the numerous small Teutonic principalities under one sceptre. Their belief in the old heathen gods was, as yet, unshaken; and if this true descendant of Woden had been but fortunate enough to carry out his plans; if, relying upon his own personal strength and the power of his well-disciplined followers, he had been able to stand forth in the same manner as, at a later period, the Frisian Radbod, or the Saxon Widukind, who can assert that the light-haired Angles, being thus materially strengthened by a union of their forces, would not have victoriously withstood even the apostles of Gregory the Great? It is, therefore, of the greatest importance for the history of the following centuries that the Jutes of Kent, the Angles of Mercia, and the Christian Britons of Wales clearly perceived on which side the danger threatened them, and that they immediately concluded a defensive and offensive treaty, for the general good, against the common foe, who had tried to make them bend under his allegiance. The great battle of Wodnesbeorg, a place situated within the boundaries of Wessex

of Britain, as has lately been supposed, but, according to Kemble "The Saxons in England," II. pp. 20, 21, Powerful Ruler, and, according to five copies of the "Chron. Sax." is derived from the adjective, *bryten*, fractus, dissipatus.

itself, and now in Berkshire, followed in the year 591. But the god, under whose divine protection his valiant descendant fought, turned the light of his countenance from him ; he was completely defeated, and retired into exile, where he died two years afterwards. The dignity of the Bretwalda was then transferred to Kent, and Ceawlin's diminished territories descended to a brother's son.

This person, in his turn, was succeeded, as early as the year 597, by his brother, Ceolwulf, a man actuated by exactly the same spirit as his uncle. The throne of the West-Saxons fell to him at the precise epoch that Augustin landed on the Kentish coast, and that the new doctrine of Salvation entered, after the baptism of King Athelberht, on its victorious career, pursuing uninterruptedly its progress towards the north, so that, in the space of a few years, the whole of the eastern coast of England, the kingdoms of the East-Angles and of the Northumbrians had acknowledged the influence of the Cross. No apostle of the new faith had, however, ventured to penetrate into Wessex, the names of whose princes had a wild and terrible reputation in all the other kingdoms of the island ; and this reputation of untamed heathendom Ceowulf had as yet preserved for his people. In speaking of him, the "Saxon Annals"\* tell us that he was continually victorious in the wars which he was always waging against the kindred Angles, as well as against the Welsh, Picts, and Scots. In the year 607, we find him at war with the neighbouring state of Sussex,

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 597.

which was destined ere long to become tributary to him. But his own valour and that of his immediate successors merely enabled them to defend their former possessions; with the loss of the dignity of the Bretwalda, Wessex lost also its supremacy for a very long period. It was menaced both from within and without.

In spite of the meagreness of the accounts that we are acquainted with, there is a hopeless confusion to be remarked in the line of succession of the various princes. This is also the case, under similar circumstances, with all primitive German races: the right of succession descending from father to son was never a rule, and has only been established at a more recent period. How many centuries was it ere a regular principle was observed in the succession, and the people ceased to proclaim the strongest or the handsomest man as their chosen ruler, without being in the least influenced by the more intimate or distant degree of relationship in which he stood to his predecessor! Like all other nations, the West-Saxons clung fast to one royal race, that of Woden; but brother and cousin, son and nephew, followed one another promiscuously, and sometimes several of them were kings at the same time. As we have seen, after the complete defeat of Ceawlin, he was followed, although he had several sons, by his nephew Ceolric, who, although he, too, was not childless, was succeeded by his brother Ceolwulf. After the latter's death, in 611, the crown again returned to the family of his elder



brother, but divided among several persons. Cyne-gils was very far from being the sole reigning prince, as Cwichelm and others exercised an authority completely independent of his. Each one commanded a separate portion of the West-Saxon race, and only joined their forces against a common foe, as was the case at the battle of Beamdune.\* This division of one and the same nationality among different rulers must have weakened it considerably, and, in fact, we soon begin to perceive its effect. What was true of the Frankish Merovingians, at exactly the same period, when this constant division of the empire was not without its evil consequences, was also true, only on a much smaller scale, of the West-Saxons, notwithstanding that their state, as we have seen, contained in itself the germs of centralisation from the very commencement. To this frittering away of their force must be added the fact that the danger from without continued to become more and more menacing.

The West-Saxon kings, the true descendants of Woden, seem never to have given up the idea of standing forth as the champions of the old German heathendom until they were finally converted. Cwichelm, apparently out of hatred for the Christian faith, sent a murderer to the court of King Eadwine of Deira, whither the gospel had already penetrated. The treacherous plan proved, however, abortive, thanks to Lilla, a servant of the king, who saved his sovereign's life at the expense of his own. The king, justly indignant, proceeded to attack the West-

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 614.



Saxons. He killed five of their kings,\* and then became a Christian. In the same year, too, Penda, an energetic heathen, began to reign in Mercia, and, in an incredibly short period raised his dominions, which contained Christians and Heathens, Teutons and Welsh, to the rank of an important kingdom. In the year 628, he met the West-Saxons in the field. Cynegils offered him the most determined resistance at Cirencester, so that it was a drawn battle, and the two commanders concluded a treaty of peace. The glory of the old heathen faith, however, lasted longest in Mercia, for in a short time the apostles of the new tenets made their appearance even among the West-Saxons. Family considerations for the house of King Oswald, of Northumbrian Bernicia, with whom they were related, were probably the more remote cause of this. Besides, the Nuncio of Pope Honorius, Bishop Bernius, who was furnished with full powers to preach the gospel to the uttermost extremities of the island, thought that the time for penetrating even the confines of the West-Saxon territories was at last arrived. Nor had he mistaken the period when the supremacy of the sons of Woden appeared to be broken up; and, in the scanty records of the Chronicle for the year 635, we find an account of Cynegils' baptism;† and in those for the year 636, a notice of that of Cwichelm. Cuthred, likewise, the son and successor of the latter, became a Chris-

\* Bede, "Hist. Eccles." II. p. 9. "Chron. Sax." A. 626.

† Bede, "Hist. Eccles." III. p. 7, says that Oswald, King of Bernicia, was his godfather.

tian, and founded for Bernius the first West-Saxon bishopric at Dorchester. As was the case in all the kingdoms of the newly converted Angles, a reaction took place among the West-Saxons. Cenwealh, Cynegils' son, had hardly obtained the supreme authority before he openly returned to Paganism, and took a sister of Penda the most powerful of the heathen kings, as his wife. But he was doomed to be ruined by the wildness of his own conduct. He repudiated his wife; and Penda, having declared war against him, drove him from his dominions, 645. It is possible that many of the West-Saxons were even then zealous disciples of those who preached the new faith, and consequently lent Cenwealh no assistance in what he undertook. During the three years of his exile, which he passed at the court of King Anna of East-Anglia, he became himself a Christian. It appears as if, by this act, he drew down upon the head of his devout and hospitable host, that scourge of the weak, the wild Penda. He, himself, however, returned home, and met with a brotherly reception from his relation, Cuthred, whom he in consequence rewarded with landed estates and the dignity of a viceroy. For the next twelve years he appears to have been the chief king of the West-Saxons. The period of his reign is, on two accounts, not without importance.

In the first place, he may justly be regarded as the founder of ecclesiastical institutions in Wessex; for it was there that they showed a tendency to assume a national character before doing so in any other part of the island. A foreigner, Agilbert by

name, had been made bishop after Birinus; he was a Frank, and it was not long before persons complained that this foreign prelate could not speak to them in their own language. Simultaneously with this, as Wessex was far too extensive for one diocese, King Cenwealh proposed dividing it into two, and founded, in consequence, a new see at Winchester, to which he appointed Wini, a Saxon, educated abroad, as bishop. The Frank felt himself deeply aggrieved at this; he laid down his office and returned to his own country, where he was, shortly afterwards, created Archbishop of Paris.\* But even with Wini was this arbitrary king unable to remain on very good terms; three years subsequently he expelled him from his holy office, which was again filled by a foreigner, one Leutherius, a nephew of Agilbert, whom the latter had himself recommended.

Besides being mixed up in these ecclesiastical disputes, Cenwealh was placed in a difficult position with regard to temporal matters. Although the kingdom of Mercia had finally been converted to Christianity, the hostile posture it had assumed towards Wessex, remained essentially the same. Penda's son, Wulfhere, who was a Christian, repeatedly ravaged the neighbouring country with war; he even once wrested from Cenwealh the Isle of Wight, and gave it to the King of Sussex.† Cenwealh succeeded, however, in preserving his kingdom in the

\* Bede, "Hist. Eccles." III. p. 8. "Chron. Sax." A. 660.

† "Chron. Sax." A. 661. It was here that Christianity was first preached to the Jutish population.

most essential point ; he was always victorious in his contests with the Britons, thereby strengthening the boundaries of his dominions towards the north and west. On his death, which occurred in 672, his resolute wife, Seaxburh, seized on the reins of government for a year : this is a proof that the royal house possessed at that period no worthier successor than this woman. But this queen, whose name sufficiently denotes that she was the pride and bulwark of her race, is certainly not the least in that wonderful list of remarkable females, which extends through the whole history of Britain, from Boadicea down to Elizabeth, even supposing we are not inclined to join William of Malmesbury in his enthusiastic admiration for her.\* Unfortunately, at the expiration of a year, Seaxburh disappears from the scene of action, leaving the kingdom of Wessex during the next fifteen years, once more, as far as the kingly succession is concerned, in a state of the greatest confusion.

According to the Chronicles, which are scarcely anything more than mere genealogical lists, Cenfus, a great-grandson of Ceolwulf, possessed the supreme command during the next two years. This fact is the more credible, as King Alfred himself adopted it, most probably in his manual, from which William of Malmesbury and, occasionally, others are accustomed to procure their information.† From 674 to

\* W. Malmesb. "Gesta Reg. Angl." I. p. 32, ed. Hardy. "Chron. Sax." A. 672.

† Our authority on this occasion is "Florent. Wigorn. Geneal." p. 693. "Deinde Kenfus duobus annis secundum dicta regis

676, Cenfus was followed by his son, Æsewine, who, like his predecessor, waged war with Wulfhere, the Mercian. On his death, or even perhaps simultaneously with him, Centwine, Cenwealh's brother, appeared as king; his attention was principally directed to the south-western borders of his kingdom, where the Britons of Cornwall, urged on and supported by their brethren of the transmarine country of Armorica, and taking advantage of the internal divisions among the West-Saxons, had recourse to arms to make good their pretensions to the provinces which had been wrested from them. They succumbed, however, before the courage of the Teutonic warriors, and we have no hesitation in allowing Centwine the merit of having been the first to lay the foundation of the dependence of the provinces of Devonshire and Cornwall on the West-Saxon crown.\*

The frequent intercourse with the Celtic principalities of the West, and, indeed, the influence of the nationality of the latter upon the German element is, at this period, established, more especially by the constant blending of facts and names in the history of both nations; as is the case in the *Annales Cambriæ*, and has long since been satisfactorily proved.† The similarity between the name of Centwine's rebellious relation, Ceadwealh, and that

Ælfredi, juxta *Chronicam Anglicam* vero, filius ejus Æsewinus fere tribus annis regnavit."

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 682—"Centwine geflymde brytwealas op sæ." "Florent. Chron." A. 681, I. p. 37—"occidentales Britones."

† Lappenberg, p. 250.

of the Welsh prince, Cadwaladyr, is not mere chance. The British annals, undoubtedly, sometimes attributed the exploits and history of the Saxons to some similarly named hero of their own; but no one can help remarking the Celtish-sounding appellation of the first of the two princes just mentioned. He and his brother, Mul, were the sons of the viceroy Cenberht, most probably by a British mother.\* Their own history must be regarded as proof of this. After the unsuccessful issue of his ambitious endeavours to obtain the throne, young Ceadwealh, who was the last of the Saxons who still clung to the old mythology, was outlawed by King Centwine; hereupon he threw himself into the Andred-weald that separated the marks† of Sussex and Wessex. The

\* I here follow Kemble's theory in his essay, "On the Names, Surnames, and Nicknames of the Anglo-Saxons," London, 1846, pp. 4, 5, where it is asserted that the name Mul signifies nothing else than a mule, *ἡμίονος*. May not the similarly sounding names of Cativolcus, King of the Eburones, Cæs. "De Bello Gall." VI. 31, and of the Gothonian Catualda, in Tac. "Ann." II. 62, have owed their origin to a similar mixture of Celtic with German blood? In connection with the name, Mul, I beg to direct the reader's attention to the similar sound existing between our own words, Welsh or Walch and Wallach (gelding).

† [It may be necessary to explain to the English reader that the term *mark* was applied by the ancient Germans, to the division of land on which a certain number of freemen settled to possess and cultivate. It is derived from *meare*, a boundary. The term has been introduced into English antiquarianism by Mr. Kemble, in his "Saxons in England," who considers that the same system and name existed here as on the Continent. Dr. Pauli means, it is presumed, that the Andred-weald separated the cultivated districts of Sussex from those of Wessex.—ED.]

woods afforded him shelter while he was collecting a dissolute army, consisting partly of native Britons and partly of hybrids, who had returned to their old heathen superstitions, and, as renegades, troubled themselves but very little about matters of faith. If the reader will only call to mind how, in the early period of every German state, those who had sprung from the marriage of Germans with members of the conquered race could not boast of a perfect state of freedom, and if he will further assume that King Ine\* was the first who regulated these unions among the West-Saxons, he will not be surprised at seeing Ceadwealh assume such a menacing position in so short a time. The individuals composing the army, followed their leader with alacrity, as they were placed in exactly the same situation as he was himself; their origin, their unbelief, and the sentence of outlawry, which they had incurred after rising in insurrection, were all shared equally by him. With followers like these, who fought for existence and honour at the same time, did Ceadwealh hold the South-Saxons, whose territory was a continual subject of dispute between Wessex and Mercia, in a state of continual fear and terror, until, on the death of the South-Saxon king, the Ealdormen, Berthun and Athelhun, succeeded in dislodging him from the natural fortress in which he was posted. But his power was not yet broken, and he still continued to aspire to the throne of Wessex. The next circumstance we read of, without being acquainted with the details of the matter, is that King Centwine

\* Lappenberg, p. 258.



abdicates and retires into a monastery,\* while Ceadwealh succeeds him as King of the West-Saxons. At this period he had not been baptized, although the fiery bishop Wilfred of York, who was then residing in Sussex, after having been driven from his holy office, or, perhaps even his own Christian mother † had won him over to favourable sentiments towards Christianity. Animated, however, by his natural wild passion, he first took terrible revenge on his enemies among the South-Saxons, and then, in conjunction with his brother Mul, a handsome, robust young man, utterly destroyed the entire Jutish population of the Isle of Wight, who, like himself, were still attached to Paganism. Finally, at the request of Mul, who was actuated by the same indomitable impulse as himself, he allowed him to lay waste the kingdom of Kent with fire and sword. Mul, however, having madly ventured too far into the enemy's territory, was, with twelve of his followers, surrounded in a hut by the Kentish army, and burnt alive.‡ For this deed his brother exacted the most terrible retribution by the pillage of the province, and the slaughter of its inhabitants; but, all of a sudden, he was touched with remorse, and laid down the crown in favour of his relation

\* This fact has been firmly established by Lappenberg, p. 253, N. 2, on the authority of an old poet in Alcuin's work, who, according to Mai (*Auctores classici, è codd. Vatic. V. p. 387*), is no other than Aldhelm.

† According to Kemble's supposition in the passage last quoted, with which compare Bede, "*Hist. Eccles.*" IV. p. 16.

‡ "*Chron. Sax.*" A. 687. "*W. Malmesb.*" I. § 35. "*Henric. Huntingd.*" IV. p. 722.



Ine; an irresistible inward feeling drove him to Rome, where he was baptized by Pope Sergius, at Easter, 689. Eight days afterwards he died, on the 20th April, still dressed in the white garments worn at the ceremony.\* Are we not almost tempted to believe that the whole is some Welsh or British legend? Like some fiery meteor, that, after glistening for a short time, and announcing war and havoc, suddenly disappears, so does Ceadwealh shoot through the history of Wessex.

The six-and-thirty years' reign of Ine, whose descent† and degree of relationship to Ceadwealh is another point that cannot be clearly made out, owing to the differences in the separate genealogies, has far higher claims to our respect than the reigns of the other princes of this little state, which was continually torn by feuds and a disputed succession. It is true, however, that even in Ine's time there was no lack of wars with the neighbouring states. Things remained, as far as the Britons were concerned, in the same posture as before; and even Ine's name has sometimes been confounded in the historical monuments of the Welsh with that of their own Yvor. According to some of the Saxon genealogies, Ine was actually a brother of the two Saxo-Britons, Ceadwealh and Mul. At any rate he

\* Bede, "Hist. Eccles." V. p. 7. "Henric. Huntingd." IV. p. 723. "Paul. Diac. Hist. Langob." VI. p. 15. All pilgrims were certain of being hospitably received by Ermelind, the Kentish Queen of the Langobards.

† We meet with his father, Cenred, as subregulus. According to the most satisfactory arguments, he was descended in a right line from Ceawlin. See Lappenberg, p. 256.

demanding from the King of Kent additional satisfaction for the murder of the latter, who was compelled to submit to the payment of a large sum as blood-money; in fact the sum named by the Chronicle is so large, that we have some difficulty in reconciling it with the currency of the period. With the hated Mercians war was continually carried on, and, in the year 715, the two armies again engaged at a place called Wodnesbeorh, the present Wenborough, in Wilts. It is, however, a source of satisfaction to find that this prince was the first of all the West-Saxon kings, who, although continually engaged in war, actively devoted his attention to the development of the resources of his kingdom. Following the example set by the kings of Kent, he caused the laws of his people to be committed to writing; these laws have reached our days in the shape of the collection that was made by order of King Alfred. We shall refer to the contents and importance of this collection at the proper time.

We are also struck, during the lifetime of this prince, with the rapidity with which the development of ecclesiastical matters progressed, and also with the civilization of the West-Saxons, which was closely connected with it. This could certainly only have been the case with the approbation of the reigning sovereign. The conflict between the foreign and native elements of the infant church had continued uninterruptedly from the days of Ceadwealh. We have already spoken of the latter's position towards Wilfred. This restless man, who had been

driven from his diocese at York, through his enthusiasm for a national development of the church in opposition to the pretensions of Theodore the Greek, Archbishop of Canterbury, and who, for many years, keeping his object steadily in view, had wandered from one diocese to another, had returned under the protection of his yet unconverted patron into Wessex. His mind was there as active as ever, and, for some time, he held one of the two bishoprics. The foreigner Leutherius is not again mentioned, and we find at Winchester, towards the end of the seventh century, Hedde, a native, as chief of this diocese. On the death of the latter, in the year 703, Ine thought fit to separate another see from Winchester, and fix the episcopal residence at Sherburne, in Dorsetshire. He chose a most distinguished individual as the first bishop, namely, the learned priest and poet Aldhelm, who, we have every right to suppose, was nearly connected with him. It is well known \* how Aldhelm, who was a youth of good family, and even most probably descended from the royal house of Wessex, was impelled by his love of learning to Canterbury; how, under the eyes of Theodore and the Abbot Hadrian, he attained that complete mastery over the classic

\* The principal authority concerning him, if we except Bede, "Hist. Eccles." V. 18, is a pupil and monk of his monastery. This monk, William, wrote a "Vita Aldhelmi," which is generally marked in the MSS. as lib. V. of the "Gesta Pont.," but is found singly in Wharton, "Anglia Sacra," pp. 2, 599. Some old manuscripts of this life are shorter than the printed text, but all contain the details which William took from the notices in "King Alfred's Hand-bóc."

tongues of Greece and Rome which was only to be obtained at places such as Canterbury, and how, returning to his monastery of Malmesbury, which was buried in the solitude of the forests near the Severn, he afterwards, both by his pen and tongue, by metrical compositions in his own language, and by Latin poems, instructed the people as well as the church, both at home and abroad, with the most gratifying results. That which his great contemporary Bede, in the north of England, and the silence of his cell at Wearmouth, effected by means of the most stupendous labour, namely, the preservation of knowledge and civilization, when they were threatened with destruction, and the effects of whose works were apparent soon after their publication throughout Europe—that did Aldhelm also effect, with untiring perseverance in the south, although his labours were, perhaps, of a more practical description. It is true that his Latin writings and poems were intended for the Roman Catholic Church, the protectress and cause of all the civilization of those times; but we also learn, thanks to our Alfred, that he preached in the highways, and placed himself upon bridges, in order to sing to the people religious songs, whose old poetical form and familiar sound must have exercised an incalculable influence upon the stubborn and half barbarous natures of those living near the place. If Bede's mind was of a scientific and rather speculative turn in various branches of knowledge, Aldhelm's nature, on the other hand, was a purely lyrical one, whose native liveliness, and deep

German feeling never failed to produce an effect upon the roughest disposition. Of his activity in his more limited capacity as Bishop of Sherburne, until the period of his death, in 709, we know next to nothing, although he doubtless sowed many of the seeds of those crops which, in Alfred's day, yielded so abundant a harvest.\*

How Ine in his endeavours to serve the church came into contact with Winfred, who was subsequently the great apostle of the north-west of Germany, and how he dispatched him as his representative to the Archbishop of Canterbury is related in the life of that celebrated man.†

Internal troubles, and the conspiracies entered into against him by two princes, or Athelings, of his house, cast a gloom over the last years of the king's reign. He overcame these cares, however, and was principally indebted for this to the coura-

\* [Aldhelm and Bede can hardly be considered strictly as contemporaries, for, though Bede was twenty-seven years of age when Aldhelm died, as men of letters they belonged to different ages. The latter, whose literary life was that of his youth and earlier manhood, belonged to the school of the south, where poetry and the more elegant branches of learning were cultivated, and the influence of which was rapidly disappearing at the commencement of the eighth century, before the love of more practical science, which was nourished in the northern and colder school, of which Bede was one of the earlier representatives. The direct influence of Aldhelm on the civilization of Wessex is perhaps rather problematical.—ED.]

† "Willibaldi vita S. Bonifacii ap. Pertz, Mon. Germ." § II. p. 337. [The English reader will find a full account of Bonifacet in the "Biographia Britannica Literaria," Anglo-Saxon period.—ED.]

geous assistance of his strong-minded wife, Athelburh. But shortly afterwards, in the year 725, being tired of the burden of royalty, he followed the suggestion of this same queen, abdicated his throne, and, in company with her, made a pilgrimage to Rome, where they both finished their lives in fasting and prayer.\*

Ine was succeeded by his wife's brother, Athelheard. It appears that the transmission of the crown to a member of the female line, although that also belonged to the House of Cerdic,† was destined to occasion many internal divisions and serious troubles in the kingdom, as, at the epoch of Ine's abdication, there was still issue on the male side of his house, and all the kings next in succession had to defend themselves against the pretensions of other princes of royal blood. During the very first years of his reign, Athelheard was engaged in hostilities in order to put down the claims of the Atheling, Oswald. It is not, therefore, surprising that the Britons, who had been so often defeated, should take advantage of these dissensions, and endeavour to free themselves from the yoke, or that they should really, on some occasions, have gained the advantage over Athelheard.‡ It was only by the greatest exertions that the latter was enabled to defend himself and his kingdom

\* Bede, "Hist. Eccles." V. 18. "Chron. Sax." and "Florent." I. p. 51, give the date of 728.

† Athelburh is called, "filia regii generis et animi," in "William of Malmesbury," I. § 35.

‡ "Florent. Chron." I. p. 52.

against another foe, Athelbald, King of Mercia, who was every day becoming more powerful. On Athelheard's death, which happened about 739, Cuthred, another prince of his house, filled the same difficult position. At first he was only enabled to overcome the neighbouring Britons with the assistance of that old enemy of his house, the King of Mercia, but immediately he had effected this, the Mercian, who was willingly joined in his victorious expeditions by Angles, South-Saxons and Welsh, became once more his dreaded opponent.

Nearly at the same time, a much more dangerous enemy rose up, in his immediate neighbourhood, in the person of the daring Ealdorman, Athelhun.\* According to a trustworthy narrative, this chief, who was one of the most valiant warriors of his day, did not submit until after some desperate combats, and until he had received a wound which compelled him to lay down his arms. Some short time subsequent to this, Athelhun rendered his king a service which eventually proved of incalculable importance for Wessex. He was the person to whom in the year 752 the command-in-chief of the Saxon army against Athelbald of Mercia was entrusted. With the colours of the kingdom, and the golden dragon glancing upon them, in his hand, he rushed at the head of his soldiers into the ranks of the enemy near Burford. The Mercian standard-bearer fell beneath

\* So called in the "Chronicle," A. 750; and in "Henric. Huntingd." IV. p. 728, he is designated, "audacissimus consul."

the blows of his sword; and Athelbald, who, until then, had never met his equal in the field, trembling at the sight of such valour, determined the fortunes of the day by flying precipitately from the scene of action.\* This combat, in which the West-Saxons were fighting for their independence, gained for them the supremacy, which Mercia had so long disputed with them, and from this time their kingdom made good its right to rank as the first in the island, even against Offa himself.

Two years after this victory that had been attended with such important consequences, Cuthred died without any direct heir, and to the great detriment of his kingdom. The short reign of his successor, Sigeberht, who, from the similarity of his name, would rather appear to have belonged to the royal house of Essex than to the race of Cerdic, and who became so arrogant, from an idea of his power, that he was guilty of repeated acts of the most horrible tyranny against the freeborn West-Saxons, perishing, eventually, by an outlaw's death in the

\* The best authority concerning Athelhun and his heroic courage, is "Henric. Huntingd." IV. p. 728, who has certainly taken the materials for his description of the battle of Burford from old war-songs, which now and then appear to be re-echoed in his Latin rhymes, and which were, doubtlessly, as far as regards language and poetical feeling, far more majestic and powerful than even the poetical descriptions of the battles of Brunanburh and Maldon, which, although of a far more recent date, are at present of such inestimable value to us. See, on this subject, Lappenberg, pp. 220, 264, who uses the words of this chronicler when describing the battle.



Andred-weald, after having first been driven from house and home—together with the election by the assembled nobles of one of Cerdic's descendants, Cynewulf, who reigned in Sigebert's place for three-and-thirty years—affords us another strong proof that the internal affairs of the country were far from being placed on a satisfactory basis, and that it was especially requisite that the succession should follow some fixed rule, which might protect the kingdom from tyrants and the princes from usurpers. With the exception, however, of a few hasty sketches of warlike expeditions undertaken by this sovereign against Wales and Mercia, we have but very few accounts left of him. His violent death is, perhaps, the only circumstance which even the national annals themselves narrate at unusual length. The account runs as follows:—Cynewulf had gone secretly to Merton in Devonshire, on some love intrigue, without entertaining the least suspicion that the Atheling Cyneheard, a brother of the dethroned Sigebert, had designs upon his life and crown. The traitor surrounded with his followers the castle in which the king was stopping, and as the latter was endeavouring to defend himself against the assailants rushing in at the doorway, he was, immediately on perceiving the Atheling, disarmed and struck to the ground. The cries of the woman woke up the small number of the king's followers, who, in their turn, fell, fighting valiantly, after rejecting all Cyneheard's offers of life and lands, the only person that escaped being a Briton, who had been detained as a hostage in Merton. This Briton,

although badly wounded, assembled, probably the next morning, the royal retinue which had been left at some little distance behind, under the command of two or three noblemen. On riding up to the castle, they found the corpse of their king lying before the door, which was closed. The Atheling began by treating with them for the crown, and offered the most advantageous terms, if they would come over to his party. But they answered unhesitatingly that after the murder of their beloved king, they would never cease to pursue his murderer. They then made an appeal to their kinsmen in the castle, to return with them and leave the rebel's cause, but their kinsmen refused, observing that their own followers had, the day before, refused to do the same thing. A second warm engagement took place in consequence, under the castle-walls, until the followers of the murdered king, forcing their passage through the doorway, cut down the whole of their opponents to the number of eighty-four; only one person, a godson of the Atheling, escaped.\*

The crown was now given, by election, to Beorh-

\* My account is taken from the passage in "Chron. Sax." which is certainly rather confused, and is placed under the date of 755 instead of 783. For this reason Thorpe, "Flor. Wigorn." I. p. 61, n. 1, is inclined to regard it as a more modern interpolation, but it is, most undoubtedly, the remains of some old song, whose original form can still sometimes be traced in various instances of alliteration, and in the dialogue maintained by the two armies, that is carried on in the first person. Compare Lappenberg, "Florent." I. p. 60, "W. Malmesb." I. § 42, and "Henric. Huntingd." IV. p. 731.

tric, another member of the royal house, while he who had the greatest claim to it was passed over. This person was a great-grandson of King Ine's brother Ingild, named Ealhmund, who had obtained the royal crown of Kent, most probably by similar means to those which, in former years, Ceadwealh had employed against Sussex. Ealhmund's son, Egberht, a bold and ambitious young man, remembered his claims to the throne of his original country, and the new ruler could only maintain his position by obliging the pretender to leave the kingdom and even the island. As long as Beorhtric lived, Egberht never again ventured on any measures in support of his pretensions. Meanwhile, the West-Saxons found that they had been in no wise deceived in their last choice, for the whole of Beorhtric's reign was more peaceable and happy than that of any king that had ever preceded him. It is true that, at this period, on the coast near Dorchester, the forerunners of evil days made their appearance in the shape of three vessels of those piratical Northmen, who were destined, ere many years had passed, to overrun the rich island in its entire length and breadth; but with the exception of a few acts of plunder and the murder of the port-reeve of the place and his followers, who had gone down to meet them on their landing, in order to levy the usual dues, they committed, on this occasion no further depredations.\*

A lasting peace had been concluded with Mercia,

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 787. "Æthelweard, Chron." III. proem. p. 509, "Florent." I. p. 62.

as Beorhtric, immediately after mounting the throne, had married Eadburh, the daughter of the great king Offa. For a considerable period the sword was now laid aside, and the hands which had formerly wielded it busied themselves far more profitably with the ploughshare. But in the person of his wife, the king was fostering a viper in his own house. She was descended from a mother who, on one occasion, drove a dagger into the bosom of her own son-in-law, and thinking that her influence with her husband was diminished in consequence—for she was very skilful in forwarding the interests of her native country—she did not for an instant hesitate in putting poison in the cup of the Ealdorman Worr, a young and talented favourite of the king. But Beorhtric also tasted the drink and died, a victim to his wife's machinations.\* Eadburh fled, laden with treasures, and, after a long and unsettled life in the country of the Langobards, met with a wretched and shameful end.†

Thus perished Beorhtric exactly at the period that Charlemagne was on his way to Italy, in order to receive the imperial crown from the hands of the Pope at Rome. During his absence, Egberht, who had passed the thirteen‡ years of his exile in the

\* Not before 801; according to "Cod. Dipl." No. 180, all these events did not happen until the year 802.

† Asser, "*Gesta Ælfredi*," p. 471. Asser, as before remarked, p. 11, relates this story, and the subsequent fortunes of the miserable queen at considerable length, having first heard them from the lips of his royal friend. Asser's account is copied by "Florent. Wigorn." I. p. 76, and "Simeon. Dunelm. Chron." p. 672.

‡ The number III. instead of XIII. is a graphical error of the

Frankish camp, complied with the invitation of his adherents, and resolved on an immediate return home in order to take possession of the throne, which no one now dared to dispute with him. His long residence and familiarity with Charlemagne were not without the most marked and lasting influence upon the development of his own personal character and the future history of his reign. A lively intercourse had long since been established between the Franks and Anglo-Saxons, and not only did the two nations barter their merchandise in the way of commerce, but they were united by manifold political relations of a friendly kind and by a community of intellectual interests. Both, too, were engaged in wars with the same foe, for the Celts of the Continent still religiously cherished their old ties of blood with the Celts of the Island of Britain, and it was, even then, easy to perceive that the Christian Germanic element on both sides of the Straits would surely be endangered by the foe that had just begun to rise up from the sea. Besides, the necessities of the Church and her mission induced Charlemagne, as they had induced his ancestors, to maintain a constant communication with the learned and religious islanders, and not to allow the bonds of friendship to grow slack between him and the different courts

“Chron. Sax.” A. 836. This error has been copied by “Florent. Wigorn.” I. p. 69, and “Henric. Huntingd.” IV. p. 733. According to the same authorities, it was Offa, who, immediately subsequent to his son-in-law’s accession to the throne, urged him to act towards Egberht as he did.

of Mercia and Northumbria. The Franks still remembered what they and their immense empire owed to Boniface ; after him, they had seen what Willehad had done, and, at the period of which we treat, they were following the lessons of Alcuin with wondering admiration for his extraordinary knowledge. If, therefore, Charlemagne afforded, with a certain degree of gratitude, this fugitive scion of a royal race an asylum in his dominions, the latter, on his side, was indebted to him for many a useful lesson and many a service rendered. The straightforward, rough Saxon not only learned from the more polished Frank a greater degree of skill in the use of arms and more finished elegance in his ordinary behaviour, but he had also observed with an attentive eye how the reins of government over so many races speaking the German tongue, but between whom no national tie had formerly existed, were gathered up and held tight by one strong band ; he had become acquainted with the measures which inspired terror and dread in the souls of the most stubborn foes placed at the uttermost confines of a mighty empire ; and he had been compelled to admire the care and skill displayed in the promulgation of the laws and the administration of public affairs by which the greatest sovereign living had endeavoured to maintain order and procure lasting peace for his subjects.

Nor did Egberht fail to seize the opportunity of profiting by so grand a lesson. The idea of making out of a number of smaller elements, which could only drag on a miserable existence when

separated from each other, one great whole, which should inspire its enemies with respect, and be productive of grand results within itself, was strong in his soul at the moment that he once more set foot upon his native shores as king. It is true that, at the period of his arrival, his Northern neighbours had attempted to place obstacles in his path, and that an army of Mercian Hwiccas had crossed the boundary river, the Isis, but the attacking force was beaten back by a troop of Wilsaetas (men of Wiltshire), and, for the present, peace was concluded with the Mercian king, Cenwulf.\* No one opposed Egberht's accession; after many a troublous reign, during which one descendant of Cerdic rose up against the other, the sceptre was, at last, grasped by the rightful heir, who proved that he knew how to keep it for his house. How well he followed the Emperor's example, and how determined he was to put in practice the plans he had matured abroad, is amply shown by the fact, supported though it is only by later authorities, that the first act of his reign was, at a witenagemot held at Winchester, to give his kingdom, and the provinces over which his power extended, the name of ENGLAND.†

\* See Lappenberg, p. 271.

† [The authorities for this statement are of far too little value to justify us in calling it a fact; and Lappenberg, as translated by Thorpe, cautiously uses the word "seems." It appears to me, indeed, not sufficiently probable in itself, to be taken on the authority of writers not older than the late Anglo-Norman period, that the chief of the West-Saxons, when he had given to that race the superiority over the other elements of the population



Although this account, in its present shape, is merely an epitome of subsequent centuries, it is, nevertheless, full of pith. The chronicles all agree in designating this king as the last of the Bretwaldas cited by name; under him, this appellation and the undefined union of several states under one powerless chief, who should represent it, disappeared for ever, and Egberht substituted for it something far more certain. In his time and that immediately after him, we first meet with the new name of the kingdom—*ANGLIA*, and also with that of the kings of *ENGLAND*. We must not be astonished at the Angles and not the Saxons giving the name of their nation for this purpose, although the power was derived from the latter. From the very beginning, the population of Anglian origin had always been the more numerous, and under them the Church had first assumed a definite form and diffused its blessings. Gregory the Great even had met Angles in the slave-market at Rome, although he had sent his apostles to the Saxons as well as to the Angles. The latter name, too, had, from the earliest period, enjoyed the greater reputation abroad, and there were reasons enough in the island itself for the Saxon conquerors willingly accepting it.\*

How Egberht led his subjects to the goal he had in view must be learned from his various acts. In the first place, he never, for an instant, of the island, should deliberately give to his kingdom the title of the land of the Angles.—ED.]

\* See Lappenberg, p. 272. Translation, II. p. 3.



lost sight of the great object of his heathen and Christian forefathers, namely—to extend the German element westward, and to continue to deprive the Britons, who were again rousing themselves to action on both sides of the water, of their land and their importance. We find him, therefore, from the year 809, everywhere pursuing his victorious career in Cornwall as well as in Wales; the North Britons he ravaged with fire and sword, and on those in the South he levied taxes as a mark of their subjection, while the *Defnsaetas* (men of Devon) and inhabitants of the extreme south-west portion of England were bound still more strongly to his rule.\* According to one account, the Saxons, at that period, had actually obtained possession of the kingdom of Powis.†

His position towards the neighbouring Teutonic states was, in conformity with the nature of his plans, of far greater importance to him. Mercia still possessed anything but a contemptible power, although disputes on the subject of the succession, which had no small share in bringing about the impending fall of the kingdom, had broken out, at Offa's death. Egberht had reigned over the West-Saxons more than twenty years, when he became involved in a war with Beornwulf, who, about that period, had succeeded in raising himself to the throne of Mercia. A king of the East-Angles ap-

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 813, 823. "Florent. Wigorn." l. pp. 64, 65. "Æthelw. Chron." III. p. 510. "Caradoc." p. 25, 26.

† Brut y Tywysogion, "Mon. Hist. Brit." p. 844. "Annales Cambr." ib. p. 835.

pealed to the mighty Saxon king for assistance, and the Mercians, after they had, according to their old custom, carried their wild attacks deep into the country of the West-Saxons, sustained a terrible defeat, A.D. 832, at Ellandune.\* The result of this battle was that the influence of Mercia, which, for the preceding ten or twelve years, had been increasing among the petty southern kingdoms, was completely destroyed. The reader will remember that Ceadwealh had formerly endeavoured to establish the supremacy of the West-Saxons among those of the south, and that Ine did the same thing in Kent, the descendants of his brother actually appearing in the annals of that country as kings; on the other hand, that cruel prince, King Sigebert, and, to judge by the similarity of their names, his nearest relatives probably espoused the cause of the kings of the East-Saxons. At this period, as the old royal line of the Æscingas had long since become extinct, and Ingild's successor occupied the West-Saxon throne, Baldred, who was under Mercian influence, enjoyed the kingly title. After Mercia had been humbled, Egbert dispatched his son, Athelwulf, in company of Ealhstan, bishop of Sherburne and the Ealdorman Wulfheard, against

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 823. In this instance, again, "Henric. Huntingd." IV. p. 733, appears to write in rhyme:—"Ellendune rivus cruore rubuit, ruina restitit, fœtore tabuit." Similar is the account of Robert de Brunne, in his rhyming chronicle:—

"Ellendoune, Ellendoune, þi lond is fulle rede  
Of þe blode of Bernewolf, þer he toke his dede."

King Beornwulf did not fall, however, until two years later.

Baldred. The latter immediately fled over the Thames towards the north, and never more beheld his throne or country. Sussex, Kent and Essex, as well as Suthrige (Surrey) now entirely lost their independence; all the various royal races had either perished or degenerated, the small states were themselves sensible of their weakness, and from this period we find the whole of them united to the crown of the West-Saxons, but in such a manner that one, or more of them, was also granted to the heir-apparent for the time being as a feoff. For many years afterwards they still remained distinct in their boundaries, rights, and usages.

In the year 825, Beornwulf was defeated and killed in a battle with the East-Angles. His successor, Wiglaf, having been overcome by Eggerht, had at first some trouble in escaping the effects of his anger and revenge, and ultimately becoming a tributary ruler. Eggerht compelled even the East-Angles to acknowledge his supremacy, and actually penetrated with his host into their country on the other side the Humber, while his warriors in the West conquered the old Mona to which they gave their own German name.\*

All these circumstances happened in the course of a few years, but they were the results of the conflicts and the experience of some centuries. Out of the numerous petty states there had arisen a new ruling power mightier than that of the old, fabulous Bretwaldadom. Eggerht's supremacy smoothed the path for still greater centralisation and union

\* Lappenberg, p. 276.

in aftertimes. This prince is usually mentioned in terms of praise as being the destroyer of the heptarchy. But this is an error, if we allude to the existence of seven different principalities, for he added to his crown more than seven petty kingdoms, some of which had themselves been composed of a number of smaller principalities; besides, the royal dignity was still preserved, for a long period subsequent to this, both in Mercia and among the Northumbrians, although in the case of the latter it was under the dominion of the Northmen, while in Mercia it was tributary to Wessex. But there cannot be the least doubt that Egberht defeated every attempt that any other state may have made to rival him in his proud rank. The kingdom of Wessex, from its geographical position and extent, now imposed respect on all other powers; it embraced a round tract of country, shut up, as it were, within itself, and which, stretching away in a southern direction from the Thames, until it was bounded by two arms of the sea, contained, in addition to the old possessions, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, the counties of Dorset, Wilts, Somerset, Berks, the southern half of Oxfordshire, Devonshire, with its mixed population, and the greater portion of Gloucestershire. Its dependencies were, in the first place, the several small principalities of the North and South Britons in Wales and Cornwall, and, secondly, the Teutonic states of Sussex, Kent and Essex. The intermediate country of Mercia, whose constant endeavour it had ever been to extend its limits, at the same time that it

preserved its very existence, by the sword, and whose territories, even at a later period, reached north of the Thames down to the mouth of that river, was reduced, considering its position and former importance, to a hardly less decided state of subjection; the condition of the Anglian states on the eastern coast was still more uncertain. One thing, however, had been attained by Egberht; he had, in the common interest of all parties, drawn these separate states nearer to one another. By thus rendering their union closer, he had, above all things, put it in the power of the collective Teutonic element, to withstand, although, perhaps, with unspeakable difficulty, the hosts of invading Northmen.

Nor was this national scourge long before it appeared. The crews of the three exploring ships, that had on one occasion put in at Dorchester, no doubt informed their friends at home of the lovely island they had seen, where agriculture and commerce were then beginning to bloom into prosperity. Even in Egberht's time, the Northmen paid his coasts a visit in great numbers. We cannot here enter into the historical reasons which compelled this wild and rapacious, but afterwards so richly endowed race, to leave their poor and naked native country and trust themselves in shoals to the waves, to seek for booty, and as soon as fate ordained it and fortune smiled, to find new homes on some more happy shore. I will merely remind the reader that it is not improbable that the Scandinavians had long been firmly

established in the small islands to the north of Scotland as well as in Scotland itself and in Ireland. In the beginning of the ninth century, however, important changes in the North may have driven large numbers from their native soil, and thus, as I think we are justified in supposing, it was the Danes of the Scandinavian continent and islands who now began to disturb the whole of Europe. The causes of this were, no doubt, the same which had once compelled all the Germans to commence their emigration. The naval expeditions of the daring Vikings were, in fact, but the continuation of that expedition which had formerly been directed from the interior of the continent to the sea-shore; with this difference, however—that the pagan Northmen set out from their own element to conquer the country around the coast. They found that they could most easily effect this on the eastern coast of England and Neustria, where Teutons had settled before them, but they also pushed their excursions as far as the South of Spain,\* and far down the Mediterranean. This last instance of a national exodus, was destined by its influence, to unite the most remote extremities of the universe to one another and to be felt even by the Slaves in the North-east and the Cæsars of the Eastern Empire.

\* As early as the year 843, fifty-four of their ships appeared before Lisbon, and coasted thence in a southerly direction, up the Guadalquiver, as far as the walls of Seville. See Conde, "*Historia de la dominacion de los Arabes en España*," Madr. 1820, I. p. 283; this book is derived from Arabian sources.

But to return to England. The Danes had landed, in the year 831, on the island of Sheppey, and they appeared, in the year following, before Charmouth, in Dorsetshire, with five-and-thirty ships. They found King Egberht unprepared, for, although he led on his army in person, it was obliged to give way before the foe. He immediately assembled the nobles of his kingdom in London, and held a council with them as to the best means of defence. Consequently, when the Danes showed themselves again, in the year 835, they found both the king and his people better prepared, and were either cut to pieces or driven back at Hengestesdune.\* This fleet, like most of those that attacked the south of England, had probably come from Ireland, and was in communication with the Britons of the opposite island, for it is noticed, as the last act of Egberht's reign, that he severely punished the Welsh, even including such as had entered into similar treaties with the Danes, in the kingdom of the Carlovingians, for the assistance they had rendered these pirates, while he threatened those in his own hereditary dominions with total destruction.

This prince had, indeed, effected great things, when his end approached, in the year 838;† but he had not the satisfaction of leaving his son a

\* "Chron. Sax."; "Flor. Wig." I. p. 69; Lappenberg, pp. 279, 287.

† He did not die in 836, as Lappenberg, in conformity with the "Chron. Sax." A. 836, says. There is a deed of his given by Kemble, "Cod. Diplom." N. 239, Indict. i.; and N. 240, in which Athelwulf ratifies a gift of his father, written in the year 839,

kingdom free from the cares which this new foe must necessarily occasion.

This son, Athelwulf, as far as we can glean from authorities worthy of credit, was Egberht's sole heir by his wife Redburh.\* Athelwulf's disposition and character were but too well adapted to strengthen his father's apprehensions, for his tastes had been the very reverse of warlike from his earliest youth, and he soon manifested an inclination of allowing himself to be influenced by others, especially the higher clergy. If Egberht imitated the Emperor Charlemagne's example, and, in fact, equalled it in many respects, his son resembled the pious Louis, who, through his concessions to the clergy, allowed his power to be wrested from him, and occasioned the most mournful dissensions in his own family. We shall have occasion to resume this parallel at a future period. Devoted, therefore, to a state of tranquillity, with all its peaceful enjoyments, Athelwulf found in the protection of the Church, refuge and consolation against all the cares and exertions, which, during the greater portion of his reign, were not spared him. It is, probably, to the gratitude of the Church, for the many marks of his favour and munificence, that we must attribute the fact of some of its historians having transmitted to us the strange assertion that this prince was originally intended for the Church, and that at the time of

Indict. ii.,—"primo videlicet anno regni Æðeluulfi regis post obitum patris sui." Compare also Hardy on "W. Malmesb." II. § 107.

\* "Caradoc," ed. Wynn, p. 27.



his father's death, he had already filled some of its highest offices, from which he received a dispensation from the pope himself, simply on account of the succession.

This statement appears extremely strange and improbable; it also seems to have some connection with the two assertions, in accordance with which Athelstan, King of Kent, is sometimes styled Athelwulf's son, and sometimes his brother. Had Athelstan been really a son of Egberht, and of this fact we do not possess a single satisfactory proof, there would have been nothing to prevent the eldest son from following his inclination, and, as a member of the Church, avoiding the cares of state. On the other hand, we find that this very Athelwulf was, in the year 824, dispatched by his father to take possession of Kent, where he was to remain at the head of the government, with the title of king. In no one document, of all those that have reached us, do we find the slightest trace of his ever having been an ecclesiastic; but we learn from all of them, that in the years 828 and 830 he was King of Kent, and he unquestionably remained so till his father's death.\* Athelstan, on the contrary, is never once mentioned during Egberht's lifetime, either in historical works or documents; immediately after Athelwulf's accession, however, he is mentioned by both these authorities, as the ruler of Kent.

\* Kemble, "Cod. Diplom." N. 223: "Pro remedio animæ meæ et filii nostri Æthelwulfi, quem regem constituimus in Cantia," A. 828, Ind. vi. N. 224, signed also: "Æthelwulf rex Cantuariorum," A. 830. Ind. viii.

In the Saxon annals it is stated that his father delivered to his keeping this kingdom, together with the territories belonging to it, which, ever since they had been won, were always entrusted to the eldest son, or to the heir-apparent of Wessex. All documents, too, are always signed by him: *Athelstan rex*.\* *Athelwulf*, therefore, had been already once married when heir-apparent, and for this reason could be neither a priest nor a bishop, and, if he had the command of a warlike expedition, when his father had sat upon the throne four-and-twenty years, he could very well have a son grown up. But it is very probable that the latter, who was so much older than all the other children, and died before his father, was the offspring of a different mother,† and was not descended from Queen Osburh, and that, consequently, *Athelwulf* not only married twice, but thrice. After what has been here stated, no one can hesitate in rejecting, unconditionally, both assertions, namely, that which refers to *Athelwulf's* priesthood, and that which states that *Athelstan* was not his son, but his brother; what strengthens our position still more is, that both these facts are related by nearly the same authorities.‡

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 836; Kemble, "Cod. Diplom." N. 241, 252, 254, 259, 264. In the charters marked 256 and 1047, we even find, "*Æthelwulfo rege presente atque Æthelstano filio ejus*."

† Roger de Wendover, "Flores Historiar." I. p. 279, ed. Coxe, and "Matth. Westmonast." A. 837, in speaking of *Æthelstan*, say: "*Non de matrimonio natum*;" but their evidence stands alone and is too recent.

‡ "Henric. Huntingd." lib. iv. p. 734, v. p. 737, is the most

Having thus disposed of this point, we will return to the history of Athelwulf. This weak prince appears to have allowed himself to be ruled, in turn, by one or other of two men, who acted as his advisers to the exclusion of all other persons. One of them, Ealhstan, Bishop of Sherburne, was a man exactly resembling, in taste and disposition, the prince's father. That which was seldom true of the dignitaries of the Anglo-Saxon Church, and when true was generally censured, but which was afterwards one of the distinguishing marks of the Norman ecclesiastics, was true of him,—he grasped the sword more willingly than the crozier, and derived his greatest enjoyment from warlike deeds. We have already seen him follow the prince to the field of battle; he was, in fact, a warrior and a statesman. The other, the learned Swithun, is said to have been appointed the prince's tutor, when

ancient of all. He states that Athelwulf was Bishop of Winchester, and Athelstan Egberht's son. He is followed by "Chron. Mailros. ap. Fell." I. p. 142, and "Roger de Hoveden," ed. Savile, pp. 412, 413. The old poetical chronieler, too, of the twelfth century, Geffrei Gaimar, "L'Estorie des Engles," v. 2482 (in the "Monum. Hist. Brit.") writes thus:—

"Adelstan estait al rei frere,  
Li uns estait frere Edelwolf."

"Joh. Brom. ap. Twysden x. Scriptt." p. 802, calls Athelwulf, "episcopus Wintoniensis," but makes Athelstan his youngest son, who died very young! W. Malmesb. "De gestis Pontif." II. § 242, ed. Savile, says that Athelwulf had received consecration, from which only the Pope, whose name does not agree with the statement, could release him, but in the book "De Gestis Reg. Angl." II. § 108, Athelstan is made his son. The most recent copy but one of the Saxon Chronicle, MS. Cotton. Domit. A.

the latter was yet very young, and he it was especially, who strengthened his pupil's predilection for the Church, and knew how to turn his weaknesses to the best account.\* While the activity of the former was conspicuous in the first years of the king's reign, as long as a dangerous foe had to be repulsed, the influence of the latter could not be mistaken in times of peace, when the church raised her head higher than ever. The memory of the first never met with the gratitude that was its due; Swithun's name soon appeared among those of the saints in the calendar.

The cry of war and the note of preparation against the hordes of piratical invaders resounded throughout the land, when King Egbert died. About the same time the Ealdorman Wulfheard drove back four-and-thirty ships from before Hamtun (Southampton); but in the island of Portland, the Danes remained in possession of the field, after a despe-

VIII., calls Athelstan, his (Egberht's) "oðer sunu;" but we have already noticed, in the Introduction to our work, the small value of this MS. for the section in question. Lappenberg, p. 292, seems inclined to believe something of Athelwulf's preferment in the Church, but in the "Translation," II. p. 23, both accounts meet with a far smaller degree of credence. It is almost laughable, though very characteristic of the historians of the Middle Ages, to find in Spelman's "Vita Ælfredi," p. 2, n., all the dignities which the later chronicles heaped upon Athelstan, collected in one passage, in which he is termed: "Monachus, diaconus, presbyter, episcopus Wintoniensis electus" or "consecratus;" the rhyming chronicler, Harding, goes so far as to make a cardinal of him!

\* "Gotselini Vita Swithuni in Acta Sanct. Juli." I. p. 327; "W. Malmesb. de Gestis Pontif." ii. §. 242.

rate struggle. In the following year, hordes of Danes again attacked the lands of the East-Angles and men of Kent, and slew great numbers in London, Canterbury, and Rochester. Not long after this King Athelwulf headed his followers in person; but, as his father had once done before him, was obliged to retreat before the crews of five-and-thirty vessels, at Charmouth.\* The calamity with which the country was visited appeared to become more threatening every day. All the line of coast, wherever the Teutons had settled, was filled with dread; and the wild pirates soon appeared north of the Humber, where their projects were greatly assisted by the continual disputes about the throne. In Wessex it was not before the year 845 that the Ealdormen, Eanulf and Osric, with their levies from Somerset and Dorset, and with the aid of the valiant Ealhstan, succeeded in offering the enemy a serious check at the mouth of the small river Parret; in the year 851, Ealdorman Ceorl gained another hard-fought battle near Wicganbeorh, in Devonshire, while King Athelstan of Kent, whose dominions were especially exposed to the devastations of the invaders, was the first who attempted, with his Ealdorman Ealhhere, to meet his daring antagonists on their own element. His first successful naval engagement was fought off Sandwich;† the Saxons took eight ships and put the others to flight, after having killed great numbers

\* See "Chron. Sax." from 837 to 841.

† "Chron. Sax." A. 845, 851; Asser, "Vita Ælfredi," p. 469; "Florent. Wigorn." I. p. 73.

of their crews. But all these successes did not prevent other hordes, whose numbers appeared interminable, from passing the next winter in the island of Thanet, nor a stupendous fleet of three hundred and fifty sail from appearing in the spring, at the mouth of the Thames, whence their crews spread themselves over the neighbouring banks, and, following the course of the river, penetrated with fire and sword, into the north, where the Mercian king, Beorhtwulf, in vain endeavoured to arrest their progress. As they were returning thence, laden with booty, and intending to pass through Surrey to regain their ships, they were successfully attacked by King Athelwulf and his son, Athelbald, near Aclea (Ockley), and after a desperate struggle partially destroyed.\* Two years later we find the men of Surrey and Kent fighting under their Ealdormen, Huda and Ealhhere, in the island of Thanet; but, although the victory at first appeared to lean towards their side, they were at length obliged to give way before their stubborn foe, with the loss of their two leaders, and after

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 851, says: "and *pær pæt mæste wæl geslogon, þe we secgan hyrdon oþ pysne andweardan dæg.*" Was this account contemporaneous? The writer certainly appears to know nothing of Alfred's battles, in whose reign, as is well known, there were two very formidable invasions of the Danes, and several desperate engagements. The same account, too, is adopted by Asser, p. 469, and "Florent. Wigorn." I. p. 73.—Lapenberg, p. 291, Translation, II. p. 22, has most satisfactorily shown, from the "Annals of Prudent. Trecens." A. 850, ap. Pertz, Mon. Germ. I. p. 445, that the large fleet in question was a part of the expedition of Rōrik, a nephew of the Danish prince, Harald Klak.

great numbers on both sides had been killed or drowned. Subsequently to this, the Danes again passed the winter on the island of Sheppey,\* but, for a time, made no more descents upon the English coast. As may be remarked, their enterprises were always conducted by fits and starts, each one being followed by a pause, during which they were either compelled by their losses to remain quiet awhile, or else turned their attention towards particular tracts of the continent. Since the period when Egberht first came in contact with them during the year 832, they had continually spread war and consternation on all the borders of his kingdom, but for the next eight years there was a cessation of hostilities.

Shortly after the victory of Aclea, Athelwulf had complied with the entreaties of Burhred, who had lately become King of Mercia, and lent him the aid of his victorious arms in an expedition against the inhabitants of North Wales. Both kings penetrated as far as the island of Mona, and compelled King Roderic Mawr to acknowledge their authority.† These were the last warlike operations of Athelwulf's reign; the rest of his life is so closely interwoven with that of his celebrated son, that it belongs to the following section.

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 853; "Florent. Wigorn." I. p. 74; Asser, p. 470.

† See Lappenberg, p. 293.

## SECTION II.

ALFRED'S YOUTH, FROM 849 TO 866. — KING ATHELRED'S  
ACCESSION.

WITH the sources of information which we now possess, and which, year after year, either contain nothing, save accounts of warlike expeditions and sanguinary battles, or entirely consist of dry testamentary documents, it is a difficult task to arrive at a correct notion of the interior economy of the country, and the domestic habits of its inhabitants in those early times: it is, if anything, a work of still greater difficulty to become acquainted with the details of the lives of single individuals; and, especially, of such as by their birth and station took precedence of the rest of the people. A few names, and some facts here and there, which have fortunately been preserved, are the only monuments and waymarks to guide the traveller in his weary journey through the desert and the obscurity. The embarrassment which the historian feels in this case, almost borders on despair, filling him with regret united to the consciousness of his own inability when he undertakes to write of England, as it was in the days of its first hero and preserver. It is only the hope of having,



like the sailor upon the pathless sea, faithfully followed every guide for a safe voyage, and, when all other resources failed, of having boldly pursued some unknown course, which might, however, fortunately conduct to the nearest port, which gives the writer courage never to lose sight of the object he has in view, and causes him to think that, in addition to the reader's indulgence, he may perhaps merit his approbation as well.

From what has been said, Athelwulf appears to have been little fitted for the difficult task of preserving a country like England, just beginning to rise into greatness, from the sudden danger which threatened it. The first attack of the Barbarians, however, had passed over, without their having been enabled, strictly speaking, to obtain a firm footing among the Teutonic inhabitants of the island; and, indeed, in a large portion of the interior of the country their name was scarcely known. The Anglo-Saxon population, too, thanks to the warlike elements on which their whole constitution was based, had shown themselves, on land at least, quite as worthy of their birth as the hostile hordes of kindred race with whom they fought. As yet, too, there was no want of leaders, who, fighting bravely sword in hand, only left the victorious Barbarians masters of the field when it was strewed with their own corpses; or else by their courage and skill, succeeded in obtaining the victory themselves. We have seen how even Athelwulf roused himself to action, and how, when his embarrassments were over, he could yet draw

more tightly the reins of his power over the Britons. For a short time the people breathed freely again; the peasant followed his plough without interruption, and the pious once more sang and read the praises of God in churches and monasteries, and instructed the people in the principles of their belief and all kinds of useful knowledge, although the age could not boast of any one like the great masters who had existed in the preceding century. Indeed, even before the inroads of the Danes, the state of education was beginning visibly to decline. Ever since the reign of Egberht, which had been so productive of important results, the old boundaries between the various provinces and districts were becoming less marked every day; in the place of so many petty princes, there was now one who reigned supreme over them all, and in the states that had formerly been separate, the nobles, freemen, and bondsmen, formed the same classes of the collective population. All had assisted in the last defence of their native land, and the common bonds of descent and religion exerted their due influence on the Angles and the Saxons.

The King, who was the commander-in-chief in time of war, and, in times of peace, the richest and most powerful landed proprietor of his kingdom, lived, like his subjects, in strict accordance with the ancient customs; he consulted his nobles and the free part of the population on the public affairs, and assured himself of their assistance in case the country should be threatened by

external danger. His private property alone was mauaged by him as he chose, and for his own exclusive advantage. We know that out of his immense landed possessions Athelwulf was accustomed to make the most munificent presents; at one time to some faithful servant of his retinue, and at another to a valiant warrior for the victory he had gained, while, on other occasions, he would give large sums to churches and monasteries for the salvation of his own soul. Sometimes, too, he would, with the authority of the assembled Witan, relieve newly-obtained tracts of country from the burdens under which they formerly lay. In times of peace, this, with the exception of the favourite pleasure of the chase, and the fulfilment of his duties as supreme judge, formed the whole occupation of the prince, as it did of every other landed proprietor. The measures necessary for the defence of the country, for the wellbeing of church and state, and for the preservation of his own private estates demanded his presence everywhere, especially in times of trouble, and the King, more than any other person in the land, still continued to lead a wandering life. The Saxons of that period did not possess, any more than did the Franks, an ancestral palace or capital where they were surrounded by their family and their court; the latter was always lodged, during its journeys, in the royal villas that were scattered all over Wessex and the states that had fallen under its authority. Thus, in the first year of his reign, we find Athel-

wulf residing on some royal property situated in Kent, on the little river Stour; in the following year he is at Hamtun, in all probability busied with the preparations for his first expedition against the Danes; in 845, he was again in Kent, at a place called on Weg; two years later he had taken up his quarters in the castle at Canterbury; and in 854 he was in Wiltun.\* Besides the episcopal residence of the archbishop, he may also have honoured with his presence the two cathedrals of his own native province, as their bishops were his principal ministers. There, too, were the graves of his ancestors, and in one of them were his own ashes destined to repose.

Wherever he went he was followed by his family, his officers and his servants. His eldest son, Athelstan, a child of his youth, was the only one who possessed independent authority, having been sole ruler of Kent and the neighbouring territories ever since his father's accession to the throne; the separate districts of the small states in other parts of the kingdom were under the authority of Ealdormen.

The first object that claims our attention is the King's family. Soon after he became King of Kent, which was about the year 830, Athelwulf married Osburh, the daughter of his cupbearer, Oslac. Both she and her father were sprung from an ancient and celebrated race; their ancestors

\* See the charters in Kemble, N. 241, 246, 259, 260, 272, which contain an account of the donations alluded to in the text.

were Jutes, descendants of the brothers Stuf and Wightgar, who had formerly received the Isle of Wight in fee from their uncle, Cerdic. The names of the father and daughter afford indisputable evidence of their unmixed Teutonic origin, and, according to the ideas which were still prevalent in those times, of their divine descent. It is probable that Oslac possessed landed property in the old Jutish settlements in Kent. The young king invested him with one of the first dignities of his court, that of cupbearer, and, consequently, married Osburh at a time when he was already surrounded by royal state; another fact which proves that Athelstan, whom we soon find mentioned as being grown up, could not be Osburh's son. History has preserved but few particulars concerning this excellent woman; her career is, unfortunately, enveloped in a thick veil. The daughter of a noble race, her soul was as noble as her blood; her piety was remarkable, and all that she cared for was the welfare of her children;\* in a word, she must have been the very model of a loving German mother. Her whole energy was devoted to her family, and we never find the least trace of her having taken a part in public affairs. She never, for instance, signed a public document, as queens and royal princesses were so often in the habit of doing both prior and subsequent to her time. In fact, Asser says that

\* Asser, p. 469, has preserved a genealogy of her, and calls her; "*Religiosa nimium femina, nobilis ingenio, nobilis et genere.*"

in consequence of the horrible occurrence in which Eadburh had played so prominent a part. Osburh could not desire to be aught else than the wife of her king. History is, therefore, silent as regards her, and does not penetrate as far as to the details of her quiet, domestic life; but that her existence and labours were of this kind may be gathered from the little that a faithful friend learned from her son.

Osburh had borne her husband a number of children in quick succession; these, without a doubt, passed their childhood at their mother's side. Athelbald, the eldest, was already a youth in 850, for from that period he accompanied his father to the different meetings of his nobles,\* and even into the field. He was present when the Danes were defeated at Aclea. The two sons, Athelberht and Athelred, who came next in age, were but a few years younger, and, as far as we can gather from authentic sources, appear never to have busied themselves in public affairs during their father's lifetime. The next child was a daughter, Athelswith, who, immediately after the successful conclusion of the expedition against the Welsh, was married to Burhred of Mercia, although, as in those times was so frequently the case, she was at most not more than fifteen years old. It was at Easter 853, that the two kings met at Chippenham, where one of Athelwulf's royal villas was situated,

\* Kemble, "Cod. Diplom." N. 264, in which Athelbald "filius regis" signs a donation of land, in Kent, to the valiant Ealhhere, A. 850, Ind. xii.

to celebrate the marriage with all due solemnity.\* Athelswith subsequently accompanied her husband to his dominions, and, shortly afterwards, we meet with her as Queen of the Mercians, for the latter did not follow the course pursued, for very good reasons, by the West-Saxons, and raised no objection to women taking an active share in the management of public affairs.

Scarcely four years previous to these nuptials, in the year 849, Osburh had given birth to her youngest and last child—her Alfred. The date of the day on which the boy first saw the light has, unfortunately, not been preserved, but it must have fallen in the first half of the year, in all likelihood, shortly after Christmas or New-year's-day.† The place of his birth is, however, known to us; it was Wantage,‡ a royal seat in Berkshire. At

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 853. Asser, p. 470.

† Asser, p. 467, begins thus: "Anno dominicæ incarnationis 849 natus est Ælfred Angulsaxonum rex;" and his account is copied by "Florent. Wigorn." I. p. 70, "Simeon Dunelm. de Gestis Reg. Angl." p. 674, "Roger de Wendover," I. p. 284, and "Matth. Westmonast." A. 849. More recent writers fix on the year 848; this may, perhaps, be accounted for by the fact of the birth-day falling somewhere in the beginning of the new year, which, according to our mode of reckoning, would bring it to about Christmas, 848.

‡ Asser, p. 467, "In villa regia, quæ dicitur Wanating, in illa paga quæ nominatur Berroescire; quæ paga taliter vocatur a *berroc* silva, ubi buxus abundantissimè nascitur." We shall see how affectionately Alfred speaks of the place at an advanced period of his life. As late as the "Domesday-book," I. p. 57 a. the place was crown-land, until Richard I. converted it into a fief for one of his vassals; cf. Lysons, "Magna Britannia," I. p. 405.



that time, the country around, which rises with a gentle slope, was thickly wooded, but, at present, the smiling little town, which since the days of the Saxon has lent its name to a Hundred, is situated in the midst of pleasant meadows and luxuriant clusters of trees, through which the traveller is whirled on one of the greatest railroads in England.

What were the first objects which offered themselves to the boy's young mind? They were, doubtless, the soul-invigorating sight of the natural beauties around, the green hue of forest and of plain, and the blue canopy of heaven with its clouds, chased by a fresh wind over the island. And then, when his father and his household left the place, and proceeded to some distant royal residence, the child's eye rested, no doubt, upon the boundless and ever-lovely ocean — "where the whale reigns supreme in the heaving waves, and the sea-gull bathes itself."\* But in those times, that same sea was covered by the vessels of those lawless hordes, at whose coming every man grasped his sword, and of whose ferocity and heartlessness Alfred must have been told in the first words his infant ear could understand. In the midst of warlike bustle, and in the free breeze of heaven, the boy grew up visibly, to the great delight of his parents, handsomer in appearance and more amiable in conversation and behaviour than any of his

\* The Anglo-Saxon poets called the sea, "hwæles êðel," Andreas, v. 274, ed. J. Grimm, and "ganotes bæð," Beowulf, v. 3719.



brothers. The charm inspired by this mildness of disposition was greatly increased by his innate\* desire to do honour to his noble birth by the development of an equally noble mind; but it must not, however, be supposed that he entertained any ideas of what is at the present day termed a good education. In those times, the Church, who was the only teacher, occupied herself merely with the instruction of those who had devoted themselves to her especial service: it was a rare exception when a great layman, a king or noble, for instance, was driven, by a thirst for knowledge and a consciousness of its utility, to learn to read and write. The exercises of his youth were confined to the strengthening of his body by warlike games and by the chase, while, in the case of all nations of German origin, the mind was, at an early age, gladdened and improved by the songs of the sages of the land. It was the mother or the nurse who first related to the child the deeds of heroes in bygone ages, and how they fought with men and monsters. If ever any mother was acquainted with all the poetical treasures of her country, which yet lived intact in the hearts and mouths of all, it was Osburh, to whom Alfred was never tired of listening. His young heart found delight, by day and night, in the mighty lays that sang of his ancestors and of his people.

It was through Osburh that the child, who was

\* Asser, who is, in this instance, our only authority, says, p. 473, "ab incunabulis."

then exceedingly young—he could hardly be four years of age—first learned one of these songs. The occasion of his doing so is touchingly narrated by Asser, and is to the following effect. One day, his mother showed him and his brothers a beautiful book full of Saxon poetry, and said:—"Whichever of you children can first learn this book by heart shall have it." As if in obedience to some divine inspiration, and being also greatly tempted by the initial letter of the book, which was richly ornamented and coloured in the highest style of art of those times, little Alfred stepped before his brothers, who were only his superiors in age and not in sweetness, and hastily replied by putting to his mother the question, "Will you really give it to whichever of us can learn it quickest, and say it by heart?" Osburh smiled with pleasure, and said: "Yes, I will." Alfred immediately took the book from her hands, and, going to his tutor, read it through with him. After he had read it, he brought it back to his mother and recited it from memory.\*

\* Asser, p. 474. "Cum ergo quodam die mater sua sibi et fratribus suis quendam Saxonicum poematice artis librum, quem in manu habebat, ostenderet, ait: 'Quisquis vestrum discere citius istum codicem possit, dabo illi illum;' qua voce, immo divina inspiratione instinctus, et pulchritudine principalis litteræ illius libri illectus, ita matri respondens, et fratres suos, ætate quamvis non gratia seniores, anticipans, inquit: 'Verene dabis istum librum uni ex nobis, scilicet illi, qui citissimè intelligere et recitare eum ante te possit?' Ad hæc illa arridens et gaudens atque affirmans: 'Dabo,' inquit, 'illi;' tunc ille statim tollens librum de manu sua magistrum adiit et legit; quo lecto matri retulit et recitavit." Flor. Wig. p. I. 86, Sim. Dunelm. p. 676, give similar accounts.

Who would wish to doubt the authenticity of this story, in spite of all the objections which may be raised against it? The reader will, however, justly require that the assertion of the truth of the story, as well as the supposition that the circumstance took place at so early a period of Alfred's life, should be satisfactorily proved. The first difficulty certainly arises from the present faulty state of the text of our biography. In the sentence which now precedes the story, we are told that it was only in his twelfth year that the boy had been enabled to quench his thirst for knowledge, as, up to that period, neither his parents nor those in attendance on him had given themselves any trouble about instructing and educating him,\* and yet the very person who promises him the book and excites his love of learning is his mother. We also learn that there is a tutor in the house. No—if the theory broached in the Introduction is at all correct, namely, that only certain fragments of the genuine biography have reached us, it will then appear very evident that the text has been mutilated in this episode, where events both prior and subsequent to it have been huddled together and put down under the year 866, when Alfred was not twelve but eighteen years of age, and was beginning to think of himself becoming the head of a family. Again, the carelessness imputed to his parents is certainly not applicable to Osburh, and it was therefore, without

\* "*Indigna suorum parentum et nutritorum incuria;*" and, a few lines previous: "*cum communi et ingenti patris sui amore.*"

doubt, King Athelwulf and the Frankish Princess, Judith, whom the King afterwards married, that were blamed by the real Asser.

That this foreign step-mother—and this is another point to be observed—cannot possibly have caused the children to be taught to read Saxon poems, as some writers have affirmed,\* but rather, as she herself was hardly thirteen when she married, that she can have cared but little for her step-sons, some of whom must have been older than herself, has lately been most satisfactorily proved.† The account tells us particularly that Alfred and his brothers were with their mother. This can only apply to Athelberht and Athelred, and perhaps to their sister, who might not yet have been married. The children, therefore, were living with their mother, which could not possibly have been later than 853, in which year the youngest was sent far from home. We may even confidently assert that, shortly afterwards, this affectionate mother died. No writer mentions her any more, and only some more recent ones ‡ have asserted that Athelwulf discarded the mother of his children, merely confiding to her their

\* Turner's "History of the Anglo-Saxons," book iv. ch. 5, and Petrie, the editor of the "Corpus Historicum," p. 474, published under the auspices of the Record Commission. Asser distinctly says, "*mater sua*," and Sim. Dunelm. p. 676, copying Asser and Florence, uses the words: "*dignissima ejus genitrix*."

† Thorpe on "Florent. Wigorn." I. 86, n. 3.

‡ Even Lappenberg, pp. 296, 311. Th. Wright, "Biographia Britan. Liter." I. p. 385. In Thorpe's Translation, II. p. 41, a much more probable account is given.

education, while he himself, who was then an old man, espoused the youthful princess. But although this prince was certainly of a weak disposition, we are not justified in setting him down as so heartless as such conduct would make him : besides which, it is a matter of great doubt, whether the Church and her ministers, whom he so strove to please in everything that he did—whether a man like Swithun, for instance—would have connived at such a step. It would be inexplicable, too, that Asser, Florence, William and others, should be ignorant of an atrocious act of this description. Osburh died, probably, before her husband set off for Rome. Her death was tranquil, as her whole life had been ; she lived merely as the mother of her children and not as queen, and therefore our authorities have nothing to relate concerning her. That, however, it was to her alone that Alfred owed his love for national poetry, and became acquainted, when still very young, with the lays that the book contained, he himself most unquestionably told Asser, and the account we have received was really written by the latter, although it has yet to be inserted in its proper place.

In conclusion, we will make one observation on the language used. The mother does not require her son to read the book ; she only wishes the poems to be learnt, and this is how her son understood her. He goes, in consequence, to the teacher, probably his and his brothers' tutor, and reads, that is, he gets the tutor to read the poems,

and learns them by heart from repeating them after him.\*

In this same year 853, the boy, who by his affection and other brilliant qualities had completely gained his parents' hearts, was sent to Rome. It is difficult to say what can have actuated his father to take this step; we can only attribute it to the respect which the latter entertained for the capital of the Christian world, and for the representative of Christ upon earth, which caused him to hope that he should obtain from him such favours as the Blessing and Anointing, which former popes had conferred on the sons of Pepin and of Charlemagne. It was his ardent wish that his favourite son, whom in his heart he desired to be his successor on the throne, should, to this end, receive the blessing of the Bishop of Rome as a kind of prophetic confirmation of the fulfilment of his wishes. Alfred made the long and wearisome journey, with a large retinue of the noble and plebeian dependents of his father.† On his arrival in the Eternal City, Leo IV., who was then pope, received him in a manner

\* That this, in those times, was a usual method of teaching and of learning, has been remarked by Thorpe on "Florent. Wigorn." I. p. 86, n. 3. I would also call the reader's attention on the various uses of etymologically-similar words, such, for instance, of the old northern, *rædha*, Goth. *rôdjan*, loqui. Ags. *rêdan*, where, according to J. Grimm, "Gram." I. p. 469, n. 2, ed. iii., "the significations of loqui and legere may be expressed by recitare." I may also refer the reader to the Greek λέγειν and the Latin legere.

† "Magno nobilium et etiam ignobilium numero constipatum," Asser, p. 470. That Bishop Swithun accompanied the prince, is supported by no proof.

befitting his rank, and the consideration enjoyed by his father; he anointed him as king, and adopted him as his spiritual son.\* The young prince does not seem, however, to have stopped long in Rome on this occasion; after his father's wish had been fulfilled, he returned home with his retinue, but was destined very soon again to undertake the arduous journey in the company of his father himself.

This is the proper place to discuss a little more fully Athelwulf's position with regard to the Romish Church. In the preceding pages we have only had two opportunities of mentioning the development of ecclesiastical affairs in the kingdom of the West-Saxons. We then hinted at a feeling of nationality which was striving to obtain recognition; but such a feeling, in a small and isolated state, that counted no primateship among its bishoprics, could, in the time of Ine, be followed by no very important results; the archbishop had, from the period of the first conversions, resided in Kent. It was he who convoked the synods for the whole island, and ratified the acts of the bishops. To him,

\* Such is the account, against which no historical objection can be raised, given by Asser, p. 470, and "*Chron. Sax.*" A. 853 (the three most ancient MSS.). Still it is possible that the account of this first journey was occasioned by misplacing that of the year 855. Into what absurdities, however, some writers have fallen is shown by Hearne, "*Spelman's Life of King Ælfred*," p. 17, n. 2, where, according to all sorts of obscure MSS. of the latter portion of the Middle Ages, Alfred is not only described as the first and only King of England who was ever anointed, but is said to have been anointed, after his father's return from his successful expedition, as King of South Wales and Prince of Wales!



too, did Ine send young Winfred as his representative. As long as the kingdom of Kent obeyed its own hereditary princes, the influence even of the more powerful states was very trifling. But, at an early period, Mercia had obtained the superiority in these matters; and the mighty Offa and King Cenwulf had even attempted to found an archbishopric in their own country at Litchfield. Their plan, however, failed, on account of the constant opposition of the archbishops of the period.\* Some years later, when Egberht finally reduced the Mercians, all share in the political and ecclesiastical affairs of Kent was simultaneously taken from them. Their mere shadow of a king, Baldred, immediately took to flight upon the approach of Athelwulf, who thereupon probably resided in the immediate neighbourhood of the archbishop for fourteen years. Kent remained with Wessex, and thus, through the union of all the southern states of the island, must the primacy, which had formerly been founded by the great Gregory, have gained considerable additional strength. During the following century we hear nothing more of any collisions between the civil and ecclesiastical powers; and the synods also, which were not unfrequent under the Mercian kings, seem almost to have fallen into disuse. This circumstance would lead us to suppose that the two powers in question now worked well together, but it may also have been partially caused by the heavy misfortunes which then oppressed the whole country. Until nearly the end of this cen-

\* Lappenberg, pp. 228, 233.



tury, we never even hear of an Archbishop of Canterbury distinguishing himself by his personal qualities or his actions ; their names, and the dates of their deaths, are all that we find concerning them. Of greater importance than any archbishop, were, during Athelwulf's reign, the two individuals we have already mentioned, and on whose administration reposed at that time Church and State. While Ealhstan was exerting himself in the field to defend the various united kingdoms, Swithun remained with the King, intent only on increasing the ecclesiastical power. Although we are acquainted with very few facts that we can rely on, in the life of the latter, we yet know sufficient to justify us in believing that his influence is everywhere to be recognized in Athelwulf's weak conduct. It was Swithun who strengthened the King more and more in the idea that, with the splendour of the Church that of the royal power was closely united. Perhaps, too, he may have pointed to the brilliant example of Charlemagne, in whose states the close union with Rome had been of essential service to the temporal ruler in the preservation of his empire. A completely similar process was then going on in England.

From the period of Augustine's arrival in the island, the inhabitants had kept up an uninterrupted communication with Rome, and it was not long before an establishment was founded in that capital, for the reception of their pilgrims, and the instruction of their clergy. We have already seen two kings of the West-Saxons die there, and it was

from the hands of the Pope at Rome, that the English archbishops received the pallium, and many bishops consecration. Offa's name was not less familiar in St. Peter's than it was at the court of Charlemagne. In the year 799, the Primate Athelheard, accompanied by Cyneberht, a bishop of the West-Saxons, proceeded to Rome.\* As early as the first year after his father's death, Athelwulf entertained the project of undertaking this pilgrimage. It is said that a vision that appeared to some one or other, and which alarmed every one, was the cause of his asking the pious Louis for a free passage through his states.† Besides this, however, he was inspired by the same feeling which had formerly not permitted his ancestors to remain quietly on their thrones; and it is very sure that Swithun was not silent on the great advantage that would ensue from such an undertaking. But the precarious position of his kingdom kept the King for a long period at home, and it was not until it seemed probable that the Saxons would overcome the Danes, that he first sent his beloved son to Italy, and shortly afterwards made far more magnificent preparations for his own journey.

Accordingly we find that, in the beginning of the year 855, after having called together a general assembly of his empire, at which he set apart a tenth of his own private property for the benefit of the Church, as well as the salvation of his own soul,

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 799.

† "Prudent. Trec." A. 839, ap. Pertz, "Mon. Germ." pp. 1, 433.

and those of his ancestors,\* he set off for Rome, accompanied by his favourite son, and a magnificent retinue. His way lay through the dominions of the friendly King of the Franks. Charles the Bald received him on his passage with every mark of honour, provided him with all necessaries, and himself accompanied him to the limits of his kingdom.† After passing the Alps, and traversing Lombardy, the pilgrims reached Rome, where they remained an entire year.‡ How must the boy, who had now grown older both in spirit and understanding, as well as in body, since his first short stay there, have been astounded at the sight of this magnificent capital; he saw and appreciated what a great and civilized people, what the emperors, and what a flourishing Church had effected. The impressions then received by his sensitive mind, remained rooted there. We behold them at a later period, again appearing in the Saxon king, who, spite of the love which he had inherited from his mother for his people and their language, had still a feeling

\* I will not cite more than this fact from Asser, p. 470: that Athelwulf passed a law that a tithe should be paid by his whole kingdom is an early fiction, from which emanated the documents in Kemble, "Cod. Dipl." N. 270, 272, 275, 276, 1048, 1050, 1051, 1052, 1053, 1054, 1057, in which the deception is most evident. Compare Thorpe, on "Florent. Wigorn." I. p. 74, n. 1, and Kemble's thorough investigation of the matter with the aid of all documents and other authorities, "Saxons," II. pp. 480—490.

† Asser, p. 470, and particularly "Prudent. Trec. Annal." A. 855, ap. Pertz, "Mon. Germ." I. p. 449.

‡ Asser, p. 470, "ibique anno integro commoratus est;" "Chron. Sax." A. 855.

for what we now term the Classical, and always endeavoured to gratify his innate inclination to enjoy the same in defiance of the greatest difficulties.

His father, meanwhile, passed the time after his own fashion. Being freed from the cares of state, he appears to have given himself up entirely to the most fervent acts of devotion, and to have proved by the most liberal donations his great partiality for the Romish Church. He was, indeed, able to appear as a very different and much more powerful sovereign than his ancestors, Ceadwealh and Ine, who had come to Rome in order to die and be buried near the saints. He left so many splendid memorials of his presence behind him, that they were thought worthy of being held up to the grateful recollection of posterity, in the lives of the Popes. This king, whose foreign sounding name they did not even know how to spell, offered, as presents, a golden crown weighing four pounds, two vases of the purest gold, a sword richly set in gold, two pictures of real gold, silver and gilt Saxon vessels, stoles ornamented with gold and purple stripes, white silk vestments ornamented with figures for the priests to say Mass, besides other costly garments for those performing service in the church. In addition to this he gave, with the consent of the Pope, Benedict, large sums of gold and silver to the temple of St. Peter, to the bishops, and to the clergy, as well as to the upper and lower classes of Rome.\* We are actually astonished at the

\* Anastasius, "De Vitis Pontif. Roman." ap. Muratori, "Script. Rer. Italic." III. pp. 251, 252. "Hujus temporibus rex

magnificence displayed by a King of Britain in the ninth century. He also restored the Saxon school, that had been twice destroyed by fire since its foundation, and enriched it with the most wealthy livings. He set apart from his private property, for the salvation of his soul, the sum of three hundred mancuses, which were to be duly sent to Rome. Of this sum, a hundred mancuses were destined to fill with oil the lamps of St. Peter's, on Easter eve and Easter morning; a hundred were devoted to the same object in St. Paul's; while a hundred were set apart as a gift to the apostolic father himself.\* It was this bequest which gave rise to the so-called Peter's Pence, or Rome-scot, which, in later times, the islanders looked upon as so insupportable a burden, and which Rome would never give up until she lost all power in England.

In such occupations did the year pass away, and the royal guests of Benedict III. began to think of returning home. Charles the Bald again played the part of host, and Athelwulf remained some months at his court. In July, 856, Judith, the eldest daughter of his host, was betrothed to him, and on the first of October the marriage was solemnly celebrated in the royal palace of Verberie, on the Oise. Hincmar, Archbishop of Rheims, united the royal pair, and also placed the crown on the bride's head: this last ceremony was contrary to the cus-

*Saxonum nomine . . . causa orationis veniens—et post paucos dies vitam finivit et perrexit ad Dominum."*

\* Asser, p. 472.

tom of the West-Saxons, but the vain Charles would not have it omitted in his daughter's case. In company with his richly portioned and youthful queen, Athelwulf now proceeded on his journey, and crossed over with his retinue to England.\*

Whatever may have induced the aged monarch to marry so young a wife,† whether it was the prospect of begetting more heirs, or the pride of being connected by the ties of relationship with the King of the Franks, there is no reason for believing that Osburh had lived to behold this mark of her husband's folly; but this act of folly is the cause of history being for some time silent on the subject of the noble Osburh's son; it can only speak of the consequences of the marriage.

During the king's long absence, but especially on the intelligence of his new marriage, and of Judith's being raised to the dignity of queen, his kingdom broke out in a revolt, which proceeded from his own flesh and blood: and probably was based on other causes than the ostensible ones.

\* "Prudent. Trec. Annal." A. 856, ap. Pertz, I. p. 450. "Edilwulf, rex occidentalium Anglorum, Roma rediens, Judith, filiam Karli regis, mense Julio desponsatam Calendis Octobribus in Vermeria palatio in matrimonium accipit, et eam, Ingmaro Durocortori Remorum episcopo benedicente imposito capiti ejus diademate reginæ nomine insignit, quod sibi suæque genti eatenus fuerat insuetum: patratoque regis apparatibus utrimque atque muneribus matrimonio, cum ea Britanniam, regni sui ditionem, navigio repetit."—"Chron. Sax." A. 855. Asser, p. 470; compare Hardy on "W. Malmesb." II. § 109, n. 1.

† Charles the Bald had married Ermendrud towards the end of the year 842. "Prudent. Trec. Annal." A. 842, ap. Pertz, I. 439; compare Thorpe, on "Florent. Wigorn," I. p. 86, n. 3.

Relying on these same causes, Athelbald not only intended a revolt against his father, but also a change in the form of the government itself. Athelbald was at present the eldest; and, as he is said to have been five years king at his death, he must, on the disappearance of Athelstan, of whose end we know nothing, and about the time that his father set out for Rome, have begun to reign in the provinces belonging to the heir-apparent. It is even probable that while Athelwulf was on his pilgrimage, Athelbald, supported by the bishops and other dignitaries, reigned as ruler of the entire kingdom.

From all that can be gleaned concerning this young man in the meagre accounts that we have of him, his disposition and taste must always have been diametrically opposed to those of his father, who was so fond of peace and the magnificent ceremonials of the church. He stands out daringly and boldly from his father. It is well known that all our sources of information are derived from the pens of ecclesiastics; all these censure in the severest terms the prince's revolt; not one adduces anything in palliation of his conduct, and hardly one dares to say the least good of him at his death. In spite, however, of this unanimity of the witnesses against him, it is not to be denied that he was actuated by very cogent reasons. It was not the mere desire of reigning that induced him to draw his sword against his father: Athelwulf's weakness of mind had been proved to the world by his marriage, and the same mournful



tragedy that had been enacted on the occasion of the union of Louis the Pious with the elder Judith, was now performed over again. Athelbald feared that the country would be parcelled out into a still greater number of divisions in case of further issue; and he also feared that the arrogant pretensions of the church would occasion similar encroachments to those made in the case of Louis and his youngest son. It is probable that he had long been prepared for every emergency, but did not break out into open revolt until he received intelligence of Judith's betrothal.\* The names of his adherents speak loudly in his favour, and prove pretty clearly against what party the movement was directed: they are those of the Bishop of Sherburne, Ealhstan, that friend to valour and temporal power, and of the not less brave Eanulf, Ealdorman of the Sumorsætas (Somerset), both which persons stood next to the king in his Saxon hereditary dominions, and were highly respected and feared by the people.† It appears probable, however, that Alfred himself agreed with the account given by Asser and his copyists, in which the revolt is stigmatised as an infamous act and an unheard of crime against every feeling of humanity, and one which could only be attributable to the daring, bold character of Athelbald, who, with his accomplices, had merely engaged

\* It is to this fact that Asser seems to allude in his twice repeated introduction to his account of the revolt: "*Interca tamen Æthelwulfo rege ultra mare tantillo tempore immorante,*" p. 470; and, "*Nam redeunte eo a Roma,*" etc.

† Asser, p: 470. "*Florent. Wigorn.*" I. p. 75.



in a vulgar conspiracy, under cover of the thick wood called Selwudu, on the confines of Somerset. The same authorities go on to state that the prince's advisers had, against all laws, both human and divine, fully coincided with him in the opinion that the king ought to be dethroned.

Such was the storm that had gathered over England, when Athelwulf, still full of the pleasure occasioned by his journey to Rome and his recent marriage, landed on his native shores. It is said that, on his arrival, the whole population joyfully received him, and expressed their determination to drive his traitorous son and all his fellow-conspirators out of the kingdom, while the nobles of the entire Saxon country sided with the father.\* A conflict between father and son now appeared imminent; in what country of the Germans has not this been the case? The population took part on both sides, and it seemed as if the belligerents were prepared for any extremities, and that a civil war would soon claim its bleeding victims.† It is to be attributed only to the indescribable mildness of Athelwulf's disposition, and the excellent advice given him, that the leaders on both sides, with the consent of the assembled nobles, came to an arrangement by which

\* Asser, 471; "Florent. Wigorn." I. p. 75; even the "Chron. Sax." has, "And æfter þam to his leôdum com and hie þæs gefegene wæron." MS. Cott. Tib. B. IV. has only: "and gesund ham com."

† "Quin immo totâ cum gente ambobus rebellante, atrocius et crudelius per dies singulos quasi clades intestina augetur," etc.

matters were settled without a sword being drawn. But the terms agreed on afford another proof of what Athelbald desired when he rose up in revolt, and furnish us with the most satisfactory evidence that all the Saxon nobility did not go to meet Athelwulf and tender him their military service on his landing. A division was made, by which Athelbald received Wessex, which formed the more considerable part of the kingdom, while Athelwulf obtained Kent, and the provinces belonging to the heir-apparent, over which he had formerly reigned in the time of Egberht. There is no doubt that the very name of a crowned queen was obnoxious to the West-Saxons and that they had therefore willingly sided with Athelbald; both achieved their ends. On the other hand, what Asser says of Athelwulf is perfectly true, if he speaks of the latter as King of Kent, and if, to the end of his life, his wife was allowed to share with him the royal throne without the slightest opposition on the part of his nobles. From the very nature of the whole affair, no other terms could have been accepted, although the rebellious son reigned as sovereign where, according to all law, the entire power belonged to the father.\* We may, however, affirm that the man-

\* Asser, p. 471: "Ubi pater justo iudicio regnare debuerat, ibi iniquus et pertinax filius regnabat—et Juditham—juxta se in regali solio suo sine aliquâ suorum nobilium controversiâ et odio usque ad obitum vitæ suæ contra perversam illius gentis consuetudinem sedere imperavit." To this Asser joins the so often-mentioned story of Queen Eadburh. Compare also Thorpe, on "Florent. Wigorn." I. pp. 75, 76, n. 1.

ner in which Athelbald acted saved the country from still greater calamities, by preserving the superiority for Wessex. On the other side, the great tact manifested in properly giving way proves, beyond a doubt, that Swithun had something to do with the matter, although his name is nowhere mentioned.

Athelwulf did not long survive his return from Rome, and his quarrel with his son. To all appearance, the last months of his life were passed in peace, but it is not unlikely that, after what had taken place, his heart was broken. Before setting out on his return, he had left directions, in his will, concerning the succession of his sons, and his personal property; he also assigned large sums to the church and the poor, for the salvation of his soul, an object that always lay nearest his heart. In order that there might be no disputes among his heirs after his death, he directed that his dominions should be divided between his two eldest sons—Athelberht receiving as his share Kent, but being excluded from the throne of Wessex. In case Athelbald should die without issue, Athelred and Alfred were to succeed him in the order they were mentioned. His private estates were parcelled out among his sons, his daughter, and his other relations. Whatever he possessed in ready money was set aside for his children and the salvation of his soul. He directed that, on each of his numerous estates, for every ten bondsmen one poor man, no matter whether he was a native or a stranger, should be provided with meat, drink, and clothing,

by all his descendants, until the day of judgment, the only condition named being, that the land was to be inhabited by men and cattle, and not lying fallow. How much of this money annually found its way to Rome has been mentioned before. These testamentary directions were signed by the Witan at a meeting of the nobles of the kingdom.\* Soon after this Athelwulf died on the 13th January, 858, and was buried at Winchester.†

Athelwulf left no issue by his young queen, who, for a short time longer, is still mixed up with the history of Wessex. In the course of the same year in which her first husband died, Judith gave her consent to a proceeding that is unprecedented among heathens as well as Christians; she allowed Athelbald, her eldest step-son, to take her to wife, so little did she heed the solemn words with which

\* The will itself has not reached us. Asser, p. 472, has given the most copious extracts from it, and, after him, "Florent. Wigorn." I. p. 77. King Alfred, in the introduction to his own will, in Saxon (Kemble, "Cod. Diplom." N. 314), and in Latin (ibid. N. 1067), mentions the clause concerning the division of the kingdom and the King's private landed estates. In spite of Asser's wish to establish the good intentions of the old King, it is difficult to disprove that he wished to make Kent hereditary in the family of his second son, and it was only Athelberht's caprice, combined with other important causes, which, at a later period, saved the southern part of England from a lasting division of territory.

† "Florent. Wigorn." I. p. 78: "defuncto autem Idibus Januarii." "Prudent. Trec. Annal." 858, ap. Pertz, I. p. 451. "Æthelweard, Chron." III. p. 512: "post annum." "Henric. Huntingd." v. p. 737, "decimo nono anno regni sui." Compare Hardy on "W. Malmesb." II. § 117, n. 6.

Hinemar, the primate of the Frankish empire, had blessed her first marriage.\* The clergy, who were already highly incensed at the unnatural defiance shown by Athelbald towards his father, were still more irritated against him by this infamous act, and the opinions of his contemporaries are eagerly adopted by later writers, and repeated by them in still stronger terms.† At all events, it was a bold and insolent act on the part of Athelbald, and one which was not very well calculated to win for him, who was already hated, the good-will of his subjects. Without considering what he was about to do, without respect for his father or any feeling of religion, he took the Frankish damsel into his house, and she, at the sight of a youthful husband, soon became the accomplice of his crime. But Athelbald dared even more than this in marrying a queen.‡ It is true that we have no certain proof that the West-Saxons raised their voices against this sinful deed as they had done, not long

\* See the form of service for marriage and for coronation in "Bouquet, Script. Rer. Gall." vii. 621, 622: "Ut non videas alienum virum ad concupiscendum eum, et non mœcheris in corpore vel corde tuo," etc.

† "Prudent. Trec. Annal." A. 858: "Relietam ejus, Judith reginam, Edelboldus filius ejus uxorem ducit." Asser, p. 472: "Juthittam cum magnâ ab audientibus infamiâ in matrimonium duxit." Compare "Florent. Wigorn." l. c. Simeon Dunelm., p. 676, "Ingulph." p. 853 (ed. Francof.), "W. Malmesb." II. § 117.

‡ A most remarkable document, the genuineness of which cannot be doubted, is that in Kemble, "Cod. Diplom." N. 1058. It is signed: "Æðelbald rex. Judith regina. Swidun episcopus," and that, too, in the year 858.

before, against a similar one, nor are we justified in supposing that Swithun\* had the courage to oppose such incest, and to bring about a divorce, but a feeling of great indignation must have been felt throughout the kingdom, where a lively sense of religion was then prevalent. Athelbald, however, was of a stubborn disposition, reigning in an arbitrary manner and governing through fear; it is, therefore, more probable that he did not separate from Judith, and that it was not until after his death and the subsequent sale of the estates she possessed in England that she returned to her father.† An early death carried off, in the year 860, the guilty and hated Athelbald, who, spite of his audacity, has been treated by posterity with universal contempt. But, notwithstanding this, the people of Wessex mourned the loss of a determined king as soon as they were once more obliged to rush to arms to repel the dangerous foe that had remained quiet during Athel-

\* This theory is founded only on "Matth. Westmonast." A. 859, and "Thomæ Rudborn Annales Eccles. Winton," ap. Wharton, "Anglia Sacra," I. p. 204. Compare also Hardy, on "W. Malmesb." It is true that Roger de Wendover also says: "Athelbaldus ab errore resipiscens, dimissâ Judethâ, novercâ suâ, cujus torum fœdaverat, peractâ pœnitentiâ, tempore quo supervixit regnum cum pace et justitiâ temperavit;" but no earlier chronicler mentions any such thing. Compare Kemble, "The Sax. in England," II. p. 408.

† Probably not earlier than 861, "Annales Bertiniani." (Hincmari) A. 862, ap. Pertz, I, 456. She married again for the third time, and through this marriage became the grandmother of Matilda, the wife of the Conqueror. See Warnkönig, "Hist. Fland." I. p. 144.

bald's time.\* This unhappy prince had only reigned five years, two and a half of which were subsequent to his father's death. He was buried at Sherburne in Ealhstan's cathedral.†

As Athelwulf had left no direct heir by Judith, his younger son Athelred ought, according to his will, which all had formerly acknowledged, to have ascended the throne. Athelred's brother, however, the King of Kent, succeeded, in opposition to his father's testament, in uniting the crown of the mother country with his own inheritance, consisting of Kent, Surrey, and Sussex.‡ Whether he did this in obedience to the free choice of the West-Saxons, we do not know: the tendency to centralization is, however, again visible, especially as, soon after his accession to the throne, all the different states were obliged by the danger which

\* Asser and Florence call him "iniquus et pertinax;" W. Malmesb. "ignavus et perfidus." Henric. Huntingd. alone, V. p. 737, writes: "Morte immaturâ præreptus est, planxit autem omnis Anglia Adelbaldi regis juventutem, et factus est luctus vehemens super eum, et sepelierunt eum apud Scireburne. Sensitque posthac Anglia quantum amiserit in eo."

† Asser, p. 473. The day of his death was most probably in the month of July, 860, as Athelwulf had died on the 13th Jan. 858. Compare Hardy, on "W. Malmesb." II. § 117, n. 6.

‡ Asser, p. 473, omits Essex: it is possible that at that time Danes had settled there. Geffrei Gaimar, however, says in his "L'Estorie des Engles," v. 2534 (ed. in the "Corp. Hist."), that he had reigned over "Kent e Suthsexe, e Hestsexe e Sudreie." Speaking of the matter with relation to the church, and with a feeling of ill-will towards Athelbald, Asser says: "Ut justum erat." — "Chron. Sax." A. 860, "þa feng Æpelbriht to callum þam rice his broðor and he hit hold mid gôdre geþwærnesse (unanimity)."



threatened them from without to seek for protection in the superior means of defence possessed by the mother kingdom.

In his time, so we are told, a numerous host of Pagans came over to England, under their leader, the Viking Wiland, from the land of the Franks where they had settled. They attacked the town of Winchester, which they destroyed.\* As they were about to return to their ships with a vast amount of treasure, the Ealdormen, Osric of Hamtun, and Athelwulf of Berkshire, marched against them, and killed a great number, on which the rest at last took to flight like so many women.† In the fifth year of Athelberht's reign a Danish host wintered in the Isle of Thanet, while the people of Kent could think of no better way of protecting their property than by offering them money and demanding a treaty of peace in return. But these robbers possessed neither good faith nor loyalty, and they were very well aware that they would make a much larger sum by plunder than by any more peaceable means. Hardly was the treaty concluded, therefore, before they broke it. After the manner of foxes they left their camp secretly, during the night, and laid waste all the eastern portion of Kent.‡

\* "Prudent. Trec. Ann." A. 860. "Hinemari Annales," A. 861, ap. Pertz, 1, 455, 456. Asser, p. 473. "Chron. Sax." A. 800. Compare Lappenberg, p. 298.

† "Muliebriter fugam arripiunt," Asser, p. 473. Instead of Osric, Wulfheard is the reading of two copies of the "Chron. Sax." in MSS. Cott. Tib. A. VI. and Tib. B. I.

‡ Asser, p. 473: "vulpino more." "Chron. Sax." A. 865:



Athelberht appears never to have offered any serious opposition to this system of plunder. During his short reign we do not once read of his having taken the field in person. The other events that happened in his time are of little importance. According to some documents of his, Bishop Swithun was in attendance on him until the year 862, when the bishop died. The father's most faithful servant accompanied, therefore, the obedient son, and most likely, having once given way to Athelbald, willingly agreed to the assumption of the West-Saxon crown by Athelberht. A much more important fact for us, however, is that Alfred lived with this brother, and some of the documents above-mentioned are signed by him.\*

In the only document of Athelbald's now left us we do not find any mention of his brothers. The latter remained in Kent during their father's lifetime, and until the death of their eldest brother. The connection between the two youngest and Athelberht was of a far more brotherly character: they followed him into Wessex, and, with the consent of all the West-Saxons, shared with him their property and land, which he enjoyed in common with them, protecting it in the same manner as he did his own.†

"se here hine on niht up bestæl." Florent. Wigorn., Simeon Dunelm.

\* Kemble, "Cod. Dip." N. 285, 287, 288, 293, 294, 1059. Athelberht generally signs: "Rex occidentalium Saxonum, seu Cantuariorum." Alfred writes simply, "Filius regis." In the first document there is also Ealhstan's name next to Swithun's.

† "And wyt Æðered, mid ealra Westseaxena witenas gewitnesse,

But to return to Alfred. The years of his youth, which were contemporaneous with Athelberht's reign, were rendered pleasant by the fact, that after attaining the age of twelve he was enabled to gratify, though perhaps not without difficulty, his vehement love of reading.\* Alfred himself tells us that in those times when everything was beginning to return to its former state of wildness and confusion and Swithun, his father's preceptor, was dead, not one really good master was to be found in the whole Saxon kingdom. We can hardly form an idea how difficult it must then have been to master the first elements of knowledge. In spite of this, however, the boy was not to be dismayed, and with untiring labour overcame every difficulty. He now began to read his mother-tongue, in which he had as yet only learned different things by heart: and the consequence was that he took still more pleasure in the old songs, because he understood them better. Soon afterwards he commenced devoting his whole

uncerne dæl oðfæstan Æðelbyrhte cingce, uncrum mæge, on ða gerædene ðe he hit eft gedyde unc swâ gewylde swâ hit ðâ wæs, ðâ wit hit him oðfæstan, and he ðâ swâ dyde, ge ðæt yrfe, ge ðæt he mid uncre gemânan begeat, and ðæt he sylf gestrynde."—Alfred's Testament, ap. Kemble, N. 314.

\* Asser, p. 473. At this period, too, we meet with the first documents signed by Alfred, as well as his brother. Instead of "lectores," Florent. I. p. 87, reads "grammatici;" but at that time all instruction in Latin must have been out of the question. [This is, perhaps, saying too much; when children were placed under masters to learn to read, it was to read Latin, and not to read their mother tongue; and it is hardly likely that among the English clergy of this period, none could be found to teach Latin to one of the royal princes.—ED.]

attention to the church-service. He constantly carried in his bosom a book containing the Hours, a few psalms and several prayers, with which, at a later period, he never parted night or day, deriving from it, when placed in the most difficult positions of his life, consolation and courage, as Asser himself witnessed. If this account is only strictly applicable to the later portion of his life, that which describes the manner in which the youth exercised and steeled his body by an active share in the pleasures of the chase, is perfectly in accordance with his age at that period. Courageously and perseveringly would he follow the game through forest and over plain, until he had struck it down. He soon attained a degree of skill that set that of all his companions at defiance; and in this, as in everything else, fortune accompanied him as if especially sent by heaven.\* As yet, however, he did not accompany the others in their expeditions against the Pagan foe: his time was passed in innocent preparations for the serious reality of active life that was fast approaching, until, in the beginning of the year 866, as we are told, King Athelberht died after a peaceful, mild, and honourable reign, and the country was plunged in the deepest grief when he was laid by his brother's side at Sherburne.†

\* "Nam incomparabilis omnibus pueritia et felicitate in illâ arte, sicut et in cæteris omnibus Dei donis fuit."—Asser, p. 474.

† Asser, p. 473, in describing his reign, uses the expressions: "Pacifice et amabiliter et honorabiliter." He is imitated by Florent. Wigorn. l. p. 79, and Simon Dunelm. p. 676. W. Malmesb. II. § 118, has: "Strenue dulciterque." Ingulph.

p. 863, invents for himself: "*Iste validissimus adolescens et Danorum triumphator invictus.*" Henric. Huntingd. V. p. 739, represents him as having reigned ten years in Kent. According to Hardy's supposition, "*W. Malmesb.*" II. § 118, n. 2, he died somewhere or other in the month of February. William allows him a quinquennium, as he does his predecessor and successor, thus, perhaps out of mere chronological trickery, not taking into account the two years and a-half in Kent.

## SECTION III.

THE YEARS OF TRAINING FROM 866 to 871.

ATHELRED, the third brother, now mounted the throne, in conformity with the line of succession which had formerly been agreed on. Following the example of his predecessors, he still kept up the connection of Kent and Sussex with his own more immediate kingdom,\* although, according to the then prevailing custom, it was Alfred who ought to have reigned in those provinces. But the existing state of affairs demanded imperatively that the old custom should not be observed; the south-eastern coast of the island was that which of all others was the least secure from an unexpected attack of the foe, and nothing but a mutual union of all portions of the kingdom under one supreme head, could be productive of anything like a successful attempt at defence. Nor can we perceive any signs of Alfred's having laid claim to a share of power; on the contrary, he perceived what was advantageous to the country, and what was not, and, in the very outset, rendered the most important services to the King, his brother, and to the kingdom, by his submissive obedience. There is

\* He always signs himself: "*Æthelred rex occidentalium Saxonum neenon et Cantuariorum.*" Kemble, N. 294, 295, 298, 1061.

no mention made of any difference between him and his brother ; and we may, therefore, suppose that Alfred occupied the highest place immediately next the King, as whose deputy he exercised authority over all the various states. He was the first prince of the blood, and the acknowledged heir to the throne and the royal property.\* The nature of his claims to the latter was settled at a general meeting of the representatives of the kingdom, immediately subsequent to Athelred's accession. Alfred had expressed a wish that the inheritance left by his father and his two brothers should be divided, in order that he might take the management of his own share himself. To this, however, Athelred replied, that he had entered into possession of the property so much sooner than his younger brother, and had made so many additions of all kinds to it, that it would prove a difficult task to come to a fair division, but he promised that he would leave the whole property after his death to no other than Alfred. With this arrangement Alfred was perfectly contented. It was not until some years afterwards, when the kingdom was threatened with destruction by the Pagan foe, that the two brothers made some different arrangements for the sake of their descendants.†

\* He is called : "Frater regis," in Kemble, N. 298, "Filius regis (Prince)," N. 1061. As long as his brother is alive, Asser, pp. 475, 476, 477, calls him always "secundarius."

† See Alfred's Testament, Kemble, N. 314, which according to the historical introduction, can hardly have been drawn up earlier than somewhere in the years 880-885.

The time was now come, when, in presence of a more general danger, the history of England itself becomes more general, and we must, therefore, before proceeding any further with our more especial subject, the Life of Alfred, cast a glance or two beyond the limits of the West-Saxon dominions. Towards the end of the year 866, the whole Germanised eastern coast of the island was exposed to a more violent and terrible attack of the Danes than any ever before known. At the head of their fleets, we now behold, for the first time, the wild forms of their kings, although as yet merely represented by tradition as gigantic and cruel; but as soon as they are mentioned in the English annals, this people of robbers and conquerors, step more and more from out the northern darkness, in which they had hitherto been enveloped. Instead of their former disconnected expeditions, we can now perceive a fixed plan; and it is evident that, at this period, they had determined on forming permanent settlements along the coast, from which they might sally forth into the interior of the island, so rich in cattle and crops, and be enabled to plunder with less difficulty than they had before experienced.

The separate lives and deeds of the several individuals are, however, far from being clear; and it would be a hopeless task to attempt weaving into a continuous history the poetical legends which the Scandinavians founded on the victories of their heroes, and the short notices of their names and actions contained in the English chronicles, as even

the most recent of these notices are obscured by the influence of northern myths. Neither events nor names coincide in time or place. We are told, for instance, that it was during the preceding century that the dreaded and terrible king, Regnar Lodbrog, after fighting in Northumbria, perished horribly in Ælle's serpent-tower, and yet history does not mention the fact of the brothers Ingvar and Ubba coming over to take revenge on the Northumbrians for their father's death, until we meet with them in East-Anglia, on board the fleet we have last-mentioned. Again,—in order to be revenged upon the adulterous king, Osberht, the nobleman, Biörn Butsecarl, is reported to have invited over the Dane, Guthorm; and yet the latter does not actually appear, until we find him in the provinces to the south of the Humber.\* The real motives of the Danes' attacks, and the success with which they were crowned must not be sought for in stories of this kind, which, despite of the historical foundation on which they are raised, belong entirely to the department of fiction; these motives are to be found in the simple fact that this rapacious people had discovered the weakest point of their opponents, and therefore directed the whole force of their attack on the two enfeebled states in question.

As we have seen, the supremacy of Wessex was less firmly established in these states, than in the whole southern portion of the island. Had the Scandinavian pirates waited a very few years longer,

\* See the details and authorities of both kinds in Lappenberg, Translation, II. pp. 30-32.



it is possible that Athelwulf's descendants would have succeeded in giving the finishing blow to the disputes concerning the throne among the northern Angles, as well as to the weakness of their eastern countrymen; and it would then have been seen which of the two were the stronger, the heathen or the Christian Teutons. As matters stood, however, it was fated that the former, taking advantage of the want of unanimity among their opponents, should gain ground with incredible rapidity.

It must have been a very considerable number of ships, in which a fresh east wind, such as is usual in autumn, wafted over the invaders from their island home in a direct line to that point where the large and shallow Wash does not offer the least obstacle to a landing. The East-Angles did not even wait to engage with the mass of heathens, when their principal leader Ingvar made his appearance; on the contrary, they came to an agreement with them; they found them winter quarters, and furnished them horses for the expedition they contemplated making in the spring.\* As soon as the weather became milder, the Danes sallied forth, and proceeded by land to York, where a powerful usurper of the name of Ælle, who did not belong to the royal house of Bernicia, had deprived Osberht, the rightful prince, of his throne, and reigned five years in his stead; the weaker faction, however, still remained in arms, and the consequence was, that the country was plunged in a state of the

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 866.

greatest wretchedness.\* On the approach, along the banks of the Humber, of the pagan host, spreading desolation all around, the two rival kings, in obedience to the will of their nobles, and influenced by fear, had forgotten their feud, and united their forces for the common defence. On the first of November, the Danes had made themselves masters of York, and from thence, stretched as far as the Tyne. Wherever they went, churches and monasteries were stript of their treasures, and the buildings themselves devoted to the flames. Towards the end of the winter, the Northumbrians, headed by their two kings and eight earls, advanced to the attack, hardly leaving the plunderers time to collect their scattered forces and fly in all haste to York. Here the latter resolved to defend themselves behind the castle-walls; although at that time, as Asser remarks, they were not particularly strong. The Christians had followed the fugitives so closely that a great number entered the place simultaneously with them, while the others set about pulling down the walls. When the Danes perceived that they were menaced in their only stronghold, they were driven, on the 21st of March, 868,† by rage and despair to endeavour to cut their way through their opponents who were valiantly

\* The principal authority is Simeon de Dunelm. "Ecclesia," II. p. 6, A. 867, Twysden; also Asser, p. 474, who, though less chronologically correct, is more lively in his description. Compare, also, "Chron. Sax." A. 867, and "Florent. Wig." I. p. 80.

† "Die Palmarum," Florent. ed. i.; this day fell, however, on the 21st March, 867.

forcing their intrenchments. The Northumbrians fell back before the fury of their attack and the terrible effect of their weapons, leaving large numbers dead upon the field, and among others, a great many nobles and the two kings. The Chronicler of Durham expresses no regret at the death of the latter, as they were themselves the principal causes of their country's misfortune, and, besides that, had both laid violent hands upon the property of the Church.

The kingdom, which long years of anarchy had reduced to a state of the most utter helplessness, was now entirely in the hands of the Northmen, and such of the inhabitants as had escaped destruction were compelled to submit to a degrading peace. In the country north of the Tyne, it pleased the Danes to set up as king a certain Egberht, a creature of their own, but they themselves kept possession of the more southern districts, from whence they might undertake any future enterprises, and it was soon evident what was the object they had in view. As soon as winter approached, they invaded the neighbouring kingdom of Mercia, and made themselves masters of the castle of Nottingham. Here, in accordance with the plan they had adopted on their landing, and at York, they intended remaining quiet during the cold season, and then proceeding on further predatory excursions in the spring. But, in the meanwhile, King Burhred had placed himself on his guard. He had summoned his Witan in all haste, and had agreed with them on the expediency of dispatching messengers to his two

brothers-in-law, the King and Prince of the West-Saxons, with the most pressing entreaties for the latter to raise their ban and arriere-ban, and march to his assistance against the insolent invaders.\*

We must here pause for a while in the history of the war, in order to speak of the immediate occasion of the West-Saxons first meeting that foe with whom they were destined to contest many a bloody field, and to describe the intimate connection which at present existed between them and the Mercians, as well as the chronological succession of events in Alfred's life. This time no hostile vessel had appeared in a West-Saxon port; and during the first two years of King Athelred's reign, his people were not obliged to have recourse to arms. In the absence of warlike deeds, our authorities have only mentioned two events: the first is the death of Bishop Ealhstan, which happened about the same time that those old foes of this valiant prince of the church, the Danes, had made themselves masters of York. This remarkable man had reached a great age, during fifty years of which he had been a bishop; and, through all the storms of his life, maintained his position until he died peaceably at Sherburne, and was buried in the royal vault there.† The defence of the king-

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 868. Asser, p. 475.

† Asser, p. 475: "Postquam episcopatum per quinquaginta annos honorabiliter rexerat, in pace in Scireburnam sepultus est." Similarly, "Chron. Sax." A. 867. W. Malmesb. "Gesta Pontif." II. 247, "Magnæ in seculo potentia." Simeon Dunelm. "de Gestis Reg. Angl." p. 677. Henric. Huntingd. v. 738. Florent. Wigorn. A. 867, ed. i., mentions more minutely the services he

dom was now left to younger hands; beside the king, who was destined shortly to distinguish himself by his valour and courage, stood his brother Alfred, who had already grown up to man's estate. As, by his beauty and amiable disposition he had, when a child, been the delight of his parents and all his relations, so as a young man, he was now the pride and hope of the whole body of the people. The second piece of information relating to these times, for which we have to thank Asser, concerns him.

It is to the effect that, in his twentieth year, that is, in the year 868, Alfred had demanded the hand of Ealhswith, daughter of Athelred Mucel (the Great), Earl of the Gainishmen.\* She was descended from the royal family of Mercia by her mother, Eadburh, a most worthy lady, who, on her husband's death, had lived a pious life until she died herself; a fact which Asser, who had frequently met her, states as an eye-witness.† Her father, who enjoyed the honourable surname of Great,‡ was the chief of his own district, and ap-

rendered to the state in his campaigns against Kent and East-Anglia, as well as his share in Athelbald's insurrection.

\* Gainsborough, in Lincolnshire, still bears the name of this district.

† Asser, p. 475, does not mention Ealhswith's name in this passage, but says of her mother: "Quam nos ipsi propriis oenlorum obtutibus non paucis ante obitum suum annis frequenter vidimus, venerabilis scilicet fœmina," etc. Com. "Flor. Wig." I. p. 81.

‡ [The surname *Mucel* no doubt referred to Athelred's magnitude of body, and not to greatness of mind, and it would, perhaps, be better translated Athelred the Big.—ED.]

pears to have taken an active share in the public affairs of the kingdom of Mercia.\* The choice of the prince, who was already connected with the Mercians by the marriage of his sister, was a wise one, and his union was destined to bind the two states still more closely to one another.

The nuptials were celebrated in Mercia, and probably where the bride herself resided, with great solemnity according to the ancient custom. The number of guests, both male and female, was very great, and the revels were kept up day and night. It was in the midst of these rejoicings that Alfred was suddenly attacked by an illness, the sight of which struck dumb the loud joy of the guests, and for which neither they nor all the physicians of the day could account. Many among those assembled there suspected that some one had secretly bewitched the prince by some magical charm, or that the devil himself had come to tempt him, out of his mere hatred of virtue. Others again thought that it was some unusual form of fever, or the unexpected return of a painful malady to which he had been subject at an early age.

We are informed what the malady really was in an account which is not quite clear; and, with respect to the details, very suspicious.† On his

\* There is a Mucel who signs Burhred's charters, in the years 864 and 866, Kemble, N. 290, 291, 292. "Chron. Sax." A. 903, mentions the death of the Ealdorman, Athulf, Ealhswith's brother.

† The account of the two illnesses is to be found in Asser, pp. 474, 484, 485, 492, and was also in the "MS. Cot." This account is followed by Florent. Wigorn. I. pp. 87, 88, but otherwise and better arranged, and by more recent writers, such as Roger de

passing from childhood to youth, he is reported to have had a desperate conflict with the lusts of the flesh. On the one hand he was sorely allured by temptation, while on the other, his unbounded devotion for all that was good and noble, held him back from the paths of vice. He was accustomed to rise as soon as it was day, and, casting himself before the altar, to pray to God for help and strength. He used to beg for some protection against his passions, for some corporal suffering which might arm him against temptation, so that

Wendover, I. p. 321, and Matth. Westmonast. A. 871. It is, however, worthy of remark, that the more ancient chroniclers, such as Æthelweard, Henric. Huntingd., and W. Malmcsb. mention nothing about his bodily sufferings. The details in Asser appear liable to suspicion for the following reasons. Why is the story not connected with the account of Alfred's marriage, A. 868, which is its chronological place, or with the section, p. 474, where his training, when a youth, is mentioned? We find it, however, in the year 884, sixteen years after his marriage, and introduced by a description of it, evidently torn from the old fragments of the work, and introduced by a later writer, in a most clumsy manner, in the wrong place. The train of ideas, also, is of the most wretched description, not preserving the proper order, but completely reversed and beginning first with the marriage, and then continuing with the sudden attack of illness, and the Ficus, and finishing with its mystic cause. The same words, too, are repeated, as, for instance, "*in primævo juventutis suæ flore.*" I repeat that, in the whole form of the narration, in its bad arrangement and vague repetitions, I can only recognise some badly-preserved remains of the genuine Life, to which have been added certain particulars, especially such as those which partake of the wonderful, and the account of St. Neot. I abide by the facts related by Asser, and prefer to give them in the text, without any curtailment, only otherwise arranged, than to allow improbabilities like these to pass without remark.



his spirit might be enabled to raise him above the weakness of the flesh. On this, we are told, Heaven sent him his illness, which Asser describes as a kind of eruption: for many years it caused him the most horrible torture, which was so intense that he himself began to despair of his life. One day, as he had gone out hunting into Cornwall, he dismounted from his horse, in the midst of the lonely plains and hills, at the Chapel of St. Gueryr, where, shortly afterwards, St. Neot also sojourned and died. The royal youth, who from his childhood had zealously visited all holy places, prostrated himself in silent devotion and prayed to God for pity. The fear of being rendered, by his bodily infirmities, or perhaps by leprosy or blindness, incapable of exercising the royal power, or despicable in the sight of the world, had long obtained possession of his soul, and induced him to pray for his deliverance from such a plague. Every other lighter trial he was willing to undergo, provided it only spared him for what he was accustomed to look on as his destined office. Not long after his return from this hunting expedition, and in consequence of his fervent prayers, we are informed that all signs of his malady disappeared.

And now, in the very moment that he had taken to himself a wife—in the very moment that the marriage-guests were drinking and carousing noisily in the festive halls, the evil against which he had prayed overtook him. He was suddenly seized with fear and trembling; and, to the very hour that Asser wrote, to a good old age, he was



never sure of not being attacked by it. There were instants when this visitation seemed to render him incapable of any exertion, either intellectual or bodily ; but the repose of a day, a night, or even an hour, would always raise his courage again. Under the weight of this bodily infirmity, which was probably of an epileptic nature, he learned, by the force of his unyielding will, to overcome the heaviest cares that ever weighed upon any ruler engaged in a contest with a most terrible foe, and, under the weight of corporeal weakness and the cares of the outer world, to prosecute unceasingly his great purpose, and raise the intellectual standard of his people as well as his own. Hardly had he taken a share in public affairs—hardly had he laid the foundation for a household of his own, ere this heavy burden was placed upon him : how great and how varied must have been the course of training to which he subjected himself to enable him to be prepared for his subsequent days of misfortune, and to preserve his courage and his hope undiminished !

Some short time had probably elapsed since his marriage and the first appearance of his invidious disease, and Alfred had already returned with his young bride into his brother's dominions, when the messengers of the Mercian king arrived to pray for the speedy assistance of the West-Saxons. On receiving the intelligence, the brothers did not lose an instant, but having summoned a large army from all parts of the kingdom, they led them straight to Mercia, where they effected a junction with the

forces of that state. Bishops, abbots, and a number of priests are said, on this occasion, to have willingly renounced the exemption from military service that had formerly been granted them, and to have joyfully taken their places in the ranks of the army, of their own accord, with their weapons in their hands, in order to increase the strength of the combatants.\* They had to drive the foe from that very part of the country whence Alfred, not long before, had carried home his bride. When they reached Nottingham, with the unanimous desire of coming to a pitched battle, the Danes, relying upon the strength of the walls, shut themselves up in the castle. The hostile forces merely engaged now and then in a few skirmishes, for the besieged would not venture on a great and decisive contest. The Saxons were, unfortunately, not prepared to attempt to storm the fortress in the regular form; the thickness of the walls withstood all their efforts. Besides this, the winter had arrived, and the short space of time for which the levies were obliged to serve was nearly expired, so that, after a treaty had been concluded between the Mercians and the heathens, by which the latter engaged to depart, the princes had no alternative but to return home with their forces. According to one account, it was

\* Such is the account to be found in a document given in "Ingulph." p. 863 (Kemble, N. 297), the authenticity of which is, however, doubtful. It is a remarkable circumstance, that Æthelweard, IV. p. 513, mentions nothing of the assistance rendered by the West-Saxons, but says that Burhred at once came to an arrangement with the Danes.

Ingvar who, by his fox-like slyness and hypocritical words, brought about this arrangement.\*

This commencement of the contest did not promise much for its speedy conclusion. It is true that, shortly afterwards, the Danes retired towards the north, and settled again for some time in York, but the people had not been able to expel them forcibly from the country, and recover the booty which they had amassed. Nor was it long ere a portion of the heathen forces again set out towards the south, and pursued their way, unopposed, through the Mercian territory into the country of the East-Angles. At their head marched the terrible forms of the brothers, Ingvar and Ubba, the two most courageous and most cruel of all the sea-kings — Ingvar of the mighty mind, and Ubba of the wonderful daring.† Besides them, there were in this army other leaders, whose names have been saved, by their fearful reputation, from oblivion. They pitched their camp in the very heart of the country, at Thetford.‡

About the same time, or a little sooner, another division from the Humber had landed at Lindsey; the rich monastery of Bardeney was plundered and given to the flames, and its inmates massacred. The

\* Asser, p. 475. "Chron. Sax." A. 868: "And þone here þær gemetton on þam geweorce and hine inne besæton and þær nan hefiglic gefeoht ne wearð and myrce frið namon wið þone here." Henric. Huntingd. V. p. 738: "Vulpeculari astutia verbisque delictis inducias ab Anglis impetravit."

† "Henric. Huntingd." V. p. 738: "Ingvar erat ingentis ingenii, Ubba vero fortitudinis admirandæ."

‡ Asser, p. 475.

Ealdorman of that district, Algar the younger, to whom the West-Saxon brothers had taken a great liking, on account of the courage he had shown during their last expedition, immediately assembled the valiant population of that marshy country. The nobles, with their dependants, flew to arms, and even the rich monasteries of the neighbourhood contributed a numerous force. Those from the monastery of Croyland were led on by the lay brother Toli, whose valiant reputation in former times was known throughout Mercia. On St. Maurice's day (21st Sept., 869), they met the Danes at Kesteven, and engaged in a desperate fight. Three heathen kings fell on the first charge, and, when the foe turned and fled, Algar pursued them up to the entrance of their camp. During the following night, however, the kings Guthorm, Bagsecg, Oskytel, Healfdene, and Amund, and the Jarls Frene, Ingvar, Ubba, and the two Sidrocs arrived in the camp. As soon as the intelligence of their arrival spread through the Anglian ranks, the courage of most of them sank within their breasts, and hardly a fourth of his forces remained with Algar. But he and his trusty comrades, who were ready to hazard everything in defence of their native land, after having first received the holy sacrament, made their preparations for the last desperate struggle. Toli and Morcar of Brunne led on the right wing, Osgod of Lindsey, and Harding of Rehal, the left, while the valiant Algar himself commanded the centre. The Danes, who had buried their kings in the early morning, now rushed forward, excited by

revenge, against this handful of Christians. The latter, however, beat back the first attack, and stood, during the whole day, as firm as a rock, exposed to a rain of missiles. But, towards evening, the crafty foe pretended to fly, and the Angles, paying no attention to the commands of their leaders, rushed impetuously in pursuit of them. All was now lost; the heathens faced about and easily mowed down the scattered ranks of the Angles. Algar, Toli, and a few others only, still defended themselves for a short time upon a hill, fighting with the courage of very lions, until they, too, covered with numerous wounds, fell over the bodies of their slaughtered brothers. Only a few youths escaped to tell the monks at Croyland of this fearful defeat.

All idea of saving the clergy of the monastery, with their treasures, was out of the question; already was the horde of plunderers at hand spreading havoc with fire and sword all around. Croyland, then, four days later, Medeshamstede (Peterborough), and soon afterwards, Huntingdon and Ely shared a common fate; every one, with the exception of a few who escaped from the universal destruction, was put to the edge of the sword; while the sacred edifices were devoted to the flames, and the gold and silver shared by the plunderers.\*

The East-Angles appear not to have offered so

\* See the detailed and very lively description of the battle and consequent devastation in Ingulph, pp. 863-878, whom, as Abbot of Croyland, we are here justified in believing.

determined a resistance as their northern neighbours. It is true that the Ealdorman, Ulfketul, lost no time in marching against the Danes, who had pitched their quarters in Thetford; but he fell, with his whole army, after a short conflict. In the winter of 870, the gentle-hearted King Eadmund, the last scion of the royal race of Old-Saxony, having neglected to march with his neighbours to the field in the common cause, ventured on a battle, and fell into the hands of the cruel Ingvar. During all the tortures of a painful martyrdom, which he suffered in consequence, the unfortunate king gave proof of the most undaunted courage and unbending determination; he died for his faith, triumphing in death, although he had not been able to conquer while living: his name stands high in the list of Catholic saints.\* East-Anglia now ceased to be a Christian state. Guthorm kept it as his own share—Northumbria having been portioned out among several other leaders. After the country about the coast had thus been seized on, and the last off-shoots of the reigning families had disappeared, the whole interior of the island lay exposed to the heathens. Mercia had already been unable to offer any resistance, and everything now depended on the West-Saxons being sufficiently powerful to save the Saxon race, and defend the Christian religion against the attacks of heathen barbarism.

The winter had not passed over ere a large band of Northmen, under the command of those of their

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 870. Asser, p. 475. "Florent. Wigorn." A. 870. For details, see Lappenberg, Translation, II. pp. 38, 39.

leaders for whom it had not been possible to provide on the eastern coast, set sail in quest of land and booty in Wessex. The leaders were the two kings, Bagsecg and Healfdene, the Jarls, Osbeorn, Frene, Harald, and the two Sidrocs, who, like Guthorm and others, wished to conquer for themselves principalities among the West-Saxons. They entered the Thames with their ships, and, in a short time, their hordes spread over the southern portion of the West-Saxon coast, carrying everything along with them like some mighty stream;\* their numbers were so great that they could only proceed in separate bodies. They soon reached the royal castle of Reading, which is situated in Berkshire at the point where the little river Kennet, flowing down from the south, falls into the Thames. Without striking a blow they obtained possession of this place, whence they could sally out at their ease on their plundering expeditions, and where, as at York, there was at all times water communication with the sea. As early as the third day after their arrival, two of the Jarls, on horseback, and accompanied by a considerable part of their army, left their fleet behind them, and rode quickly onward into the woods and forests around to obtain intelligence and fodder.† Meanwhile, those who remained

\* "Henric. Huntingd." v. 738 : "Exercitus novus et maximus quasi fluvius inundans et omnia secum volvens."

† Æthelweard : "Obliti classe aut certè explorationis ritu tam celeres aut æterni numinis (?) per arva sylvasque feruntur."—"Chron. Sax." A. 871. Asser, p. 476. Æthelweard, IV. p. 513. Florent. Wigorn. I. p. 82, all speak of the following combats, and supply one another's deficiencies very satisfactorily.



behind threw up a rampart between the Thames and the Kennet, to the south of the town,\* so that being protected on two sides by the two rivers, and on the third by their fortifications, they might have a place to which they could bring their booty, and where they might be prepared to repel any attack.

At so early a period of the year the West-Saxons were totally unprepared for a visitation of this kind; Athelwulf, the Ealdorman of the district, assembled, however, a small number of brave followers, with whom he advanced to meet those Danes who had ridden out into the country. He came up with them near Englafeld (Englefield in Berkshire), attacked them valiantly, and, after a contest, which was carried on with the greatest animosity for some time, and in which one of the Jarls,† with a number of his party, was slain, he compelled them to take to flight. Four days after this first rencontre, Athelred and Alfred appeared before Reading with their hastily raised levies, and cut down without mercy all the heathens they found without their gates. The grand object was to rescue this place, which was one of the most important in the kingdom, from the hands of a dangerous enemy. But the latter, always great in cunning, craftily seized on the

\* "A dextrali parte."—Asser.

† Three MSS. of the "Chron. Sax." (lettered B, C, D, according to their age), call this Jarl, incorrectly, "Sidroc." Asser and the chronicles give him no name at all; and, according to all accounts, the two Sidrocs fell at Æscesdune. Compare Lappenberg, Translation, II. p. 41, n. 1.



moment when the Saxons were encamped in the plain, and then, all at once, rushed out upon them, like so many wolves, from all the gates. A severe conflict now took place; at one instant fortune seemed to favour the weapons of the Christians, and at the next, those of the Heathens; at last, however, the latter were victorious, and the Saxons, who were not yet used to the fury of the Northern warriors, were compelled to retreat. Among those slain was the valiant Athelwulf; his friends were even obliged to leave his body to fall into the hands of the Danes, who afterwards carried it with them to Derby.\* The two royal brothers were driven back as far as Wistley, or Wichelet Green, near Twyfort, but they escaped across the Thames, near Windsor, by a ford which the Danes did not discover.†

But neither grief nor shame could induce the Saxons to abandon the defence of their country, and the heathens must soon have remarked that they had now to deal with much more resolute foes than the Angles had ever proved themselves. Once again, only four days had elapsed when the two hosts, with every man they could muster, came into contact at a place called Æscesdune ‡ (Ash-

\* Asser and Æthelweard particularly mention this.

† Our only authority for this is Gaimar, v. 296-4, et seq. "Mon. Hist. Brit." p. 801.

‡ It is not clear what place is intended by the name Æscesdune; there is an Ashdown in Sussex and in Devonshire. Up to this time, however, the scene of action has been Berkshire, and we should, therefore, look for the battle-field either there or in Surrey or Hants.

down). Both parties wished to make for once a fair trial of their strength. The Danes had divided themselves into two bodies, one of which was led on by the two kings, and the other by the earls. When the Christians observed this, they did the same thing, dividing themselves also into two parties. According to the old German etiquette of war, King Athelred took up his position where he would be opposed by leaders of equal rank, so that the task of attacking the second division of the foe devolved upon Alfred.

This day, however, he was fated to have still greater things required of him, and destined to prove, although still so young, that he was born to accomplish acts of the greatest heroism. When day broke, it promised but little that was cheering for the Saxons. The Danes had taken possession of an eminence whose side was overgrown with short thick brushwood; and from behind this wall of verdure they were enabled to shoot their well-aimed darts at the Saxons while the latter toiled with difficulty up the ascent. As Asser heard from eyewitnesses worthy of all credit,\* it was Alfred who, at an early hour of the morning, arrived with his division at the foot of the hill, while Athelred was still engaged in hearing mass in his tent, swearing solemnly that, before the priest had

\* "*Sicut ab his qui viderunt veridicis referentibus audivimus.*" — Asser, p. 476. For this reason, his account is the fullest we possess. The woody battle-field Asser himself afterwards beheld with his own eyes: "*Quam nos ipsi propriis nostris oculis vidimus.*"

finished, no earthly matters should prevent him from fulfilling his duty towards God. Although the old historians may ascribe all the credit of the victory to this pious behaviour of the king, it is very evident that his delay very nearly exposed him to a similar misfortune to that which, in far more modern times, overtook another Saxon, who conscientiously stayed out the conclusion of the sermon, while, in spite of its being Sunday, the enemy had attacked and over-powered his allies.

Fortunately for England, Alfred was at his place at the right moment. For a short time he waited with feelings of the most painful description for the coming of his brother, whose place it was to be at the head of the army and exercise the supreme command. As, however, the latter still tarried, and the enemy were pouring down upon Alfred with all their force, so that he could no longer maintain his position without either giving way or advancing, contrary to the orders he had received, he, at last, with a firm reliance in the protection of heaven, commanded the signal for the attack to be given, and rushed up the hill at the head of his followers, as boldly as a boar,\* against both divisions of the enemy's forces. The heathens received him with volleys of missiles from behind the brushwood, but they could not make him turn back, and both parties were immediately engaged, hand to hand, in a sanguinary conflict. Meanwhile, Alfred's brother reached the scene of

\* "Viriliter aprino more."

combat, and, placing himself instantly at the head of his division, bore down valiantly upon the forces, which, under the leadership of Bagsecg and Healfdene, were opposed to him.\* The strife now raged along the whole line in the midst of the most terrific noise, proofs of the greatest courage being given by both parties. But the Saxons felt that they were fighting for life and land, for their native country, and all that they held dear, until, at last, it was impossible for the heathens to withstand their repeated and determined attacks any longer. The Danish ranks began to waver; and a most horrid butchery then took place, covering the large wide plain around Æscesdune, which was the scene of action, with many thousand bodies of the slain. Among the dead were found King Bagsecg, who was slain by Athelred himself,† the elder Sidroc, the younger Sidroc, Osbearn, Frene, Harald, and all the youths of noble birth in the Danish ranks. Since the Saxons had landed in Britain, exclaims Æthelward, there had never been such a battle before. The remains of the Danish host fled in the wildest confusion from the field of battle. The Saxons pursued them all that night and the next day to the walls of the Castle of Reading. A great number of the fugitives were, however, cut down on the road.‡ For the first time since the battle of Aclea, and once more

\* "Chron. Sax." and Henric. Huntingd. say, decidedly, that Athelred followed the plan that had been before agreed on.

† Sic "Henric. Huntingd." V. p. 738.

‡ All the authorities agree about this issue of the battle.

at the hands of the West-Saxons, the Northmen had sustained a great defeat. Alfred bore away the glory of the victory, and the noble consciousness, which must have cheered him in his latest years, that, by remaining undismayed and by acting at the critical moment, he had saved his native land.

But the victors did not yet, by any means, dare to give themselves up to indolent tranquillity: the foe was still firmly seated in Reading, and fresh hordes might every day come up the Thames, and join them, to supply their recent losses. Hardly a fortnight had elapsed, ere the two brothers again drew up their warriors in battle-array near Basing in Hampshire.\* But this time the fortune of war was less favourable to them. The Danes occupied the more favourable position as they had done at *Æscesdune*, and, after a stubborn contest, kept possession of the field of battle, but, as it has been remarked,† without any spoil to carry off as the fruit of their victory. Soon after this their forces were so increased by the arrival of a fresh horde of their countrymen‡ that the danger which menaced Wessex assumed, in spite of the recent victory, a more formidable aspect every day. A considerable portion of the West-Saxon territories

\* "*Æt Basingum.*" "*Chron. Sax.*" "*Basengas adierunt,*" Asser. "*In loco Basingon,*" *Æthelweard.* "*Apud Basingum,*" *Henric. Huntingd.*

† Especially by *Æthelweard*, l. c.

‡ Asser, p. 477, "*De ultramarinis partibus alius paganorum exercitus societati se adjunxit.*"

was always liable to be laid waste by the invaders ; for the place on which the battle was fought two months afterwards shows us the scene of action transferred to no trifling distance from where we have hitherto beheld it. It was at Merton \* that Athelred and Alfred once more stood on the defensive against two northern hosts. On both wings were the Saxons victorious throughout the day ; but many of their brave warriors, and, among the number, Heahmund, Bishop of Sherburne, the worthy successor of the valiant Ealhstan, having been slain, they were, despite their success, obliged to leave the heathens in possession of the field at night.†

In this gloomy condition were the future prospects of the only Teutonic state in England that had taken up, and, with persevering courage, carried on the contest with the barbarians, when, shortly after the defeat at Merton, King Athelred died, on the 23rd of April, 871.‡ It is not quite clear whether he sank from the wounds he had received

\* Meretune, "Chron. Sax." Merantune, Æthelweard. Mere-dune, Henric. Huntingd. V. p. 738. Florent. Wigorn. I. p. 85. Either the place of this name in Oxfordshire or Surrey is that meant, I believe it is the latter. Asser does not mention this fight at all. See Introduction.

† Mentioned particularly in "Chron. Sax." and Æthelweard, l. c.

‡ Asser, p. 477, "Regno quinque annis per multas tribulationes strenuè atque honorabiliter gubernato." According to him, Æthelweard and Henric. Huntingd., Athelred died "post Pascha;" "Chron. Sax.," "ofer eastron;" Florent. Wigorn. I. p. 85, "ix. Kal. Maii," that is three weeks after Easter, as this fell in the year 871, on the 31st March.

or whether he died a natural death. His persevering and honourable conduct during a reign of five years has won for him the respect of after-ages. Alfred, the heir to the throne, who now assumed the government of Wessex at a most critical moment, caused his brother to be buried with royal honours at Wimborne-Minster in Dorsetshire. We are not sure, but we have every reason for supposing that Sherburne, where the regular vault of the West-Saxon kings was situated, was, especially after the heroic death of its last bishop, either threatened by the Danes or actually in their possession.\*

It is, at present much to be regretted that, with the exception of Alfred's testament, we possess no detailed account concerning Athelred's last arrangements, and the accession of his so hopeful brother to the helm of affairs. Athelred left direct heirs in the persons of two sons not of age, the elder of whom Athelwald, in after years, when Alfred's worldly course was run, appeared as Pretender against his cousin Edward. The historian Æthelweard the chronicler is also descended in a direct line from Athelred, as, after mentioning the king's death, he proves at length in an address to the princess Mahtild, who traced her descent as far back as Alfred.† But at a time of such great and

\* In opposition to all other authorities MS. Cott. Tib. B. I. reads: "Æt Scireburnanmenster."

† Æthelweard, IV. p. 514, and the dedication to the princess at the beginning of his work. Compare Lappenberg, Introduction. p. lvii.

universal danger all ideas of encircling with the crown of Wessex the temples of a child were entirely out of the question; in a crisis like this, it was by no means irrevocably settled that the succession was to descend from father to son; besides which, we know that Alfred had formerly been selected by his father, and, at a subsequent period, by his brother, as the sole heir to the throne. As far as regards their private affairs, the interest of Athelred's children had occupied their father's attention during the very last days of his life. At a time when everyone was constantly engaged in deadly strife with the heathens, and oppressed with sad misgivings for life and land, the two brothers, considering the great danger which threatened them, settled, in a Witenagemot at Swinbeorh,\* that each should give his children something from his inheritance, so that they might have enough to live, in case they became orphans; the general inheritance, however, as well as the right of succeeding to the throne were again promised Alfred. We do not, therefore, find the slightest hint thrown out that Alfred usurped the throne to the exclusion of his nephews; not only had he been destined to be king of the West-Saxons by the mystic anointing of Pope Leo IV., but he had long been recognised as the heir-apparent, and the people had no other and no better person on whom their choice could fall. They themselves had all been witnesses of the training to

\* "On gemóte æt Swínbeorgum."—Alfred's Testament, Kemble, N. 314.



which Alfred had subjected himself in his youth, and they felt that he was the only person who, by his heroic valour and noble enthusiasm, would be enabled, with the assistance of his faithful friend, to defend their beloved native land; all their hopes were built on him, to whom, at the moment of his accession, they looked up to save Wessex and the Christian religion from destruction.

## SECTION IV.

THE YEARS OF TRIAL, FROM 871 TO 881.

It is a weary task both for the author and his reader, to be obliged, for a great part of Alfred's life, commencing with the moment that he ascended the throne, to direct their whole attention to the uninterrupted struggle between the king and his northern foes. The picture of this portion of Anglo-Saxon history always remains the same, until its uniformity at last confuses and tires us; the years alone roll on and the places change, but two Teutonic races are seen continually contending for the superiority, both, in turn, at one moment conquering, and at the next conquered. But it were as wrong to abstain, on this account, from a true historical relation of what took place, as to be contented with merely noting down the facts as they occurred, year by year. Our interest is excited only so long as we do not, even for a single instant, lose sight of the goal, to which the various events tend: and while we steadfastly bear in mind what was the prize to be gained, what advantage the Danes wished to obtain, and what was the treasure which the Saxons had to defend; while, in a word, we endeavour to read simultaneously the mind and the

heart of the hero, who thought that his appointed task was to defend his people from the wild influence of heathendom, and preserve their hard-won intellectual and material riches.\*

In most other cases, especially in earlier times, on the occasion of another sovereign mounting the throne, the grave and majestic step of history is stayed for a moment, and the historian has time to see homage paid to the young ruler, from whom the world hopes so much, and whom he has resolved to accompany faithfully through pleasure and through pain, through victory and through defeat; but it is in vain that we look for such a resting-place in Alfred's life. Not a word is said of his solemn inauguration as king; the ceremony was understood; in the state in which England then was, there was no time for it to be actually performed. The young prince was instantly called upon to fulfil the most difficult duties of his position; he only left his brother's tomb in the monastery at Wimburn to arm his followers in all haste for the field.

Soon after the battle of Merton, a large fleet, that had sailed from home on a summer voyage, put

\* That such a view of the case is far from being taken by William of Malmesbury, II. § 121, who rejects the tedious task from similar motives to those we have mentioned, is very evident to all who read his book; in very high-flown words he disclaims all idea of his being bound down by the example of his predecessors and contemporaries. After the words: "*Summatim igitur omnia exponam*," the reader naturally expects a clever summary of Alfred's active life; instead of which he finds an account of how St. Cuthbert appeared in the wilderness of Athelney in a dream.

in near Reading;\* and with so considerable a reinforcement the enemy penetrated deep into the interior of the West-Saxon provinces. Deeply grieved at the sufferings of his subjects, Alfred tasted none of the joys of his new dignity; he only felt that the whole burden of it now rested entirely on him. After his brother's death even his confidence in Heaven appears to have been shaken, and he began to doubt if he alone should be able to withstand the pagan hordes. He was a whole month before he would venture, at the head of a small band, to take the field again. The place from which he started was most probably Wimburn, as he had previously been obliged to retreat into the western districts of his kingdom. He met the foe in Wiltshire near Wiltun Castle, which is situated on an eminence on the left bank of the little river Willy. He and his followers fought with the greatest bravery against far superior numbers. Despair lent them strength and the day seemed already their own, when the enemy suddenly took to flight, and once more were the exulting victors deceived by the cunning of the northern warriors. They were stopt in their eager pursuit of the foe by an unexpected body of the latter drawn up in battle array, against whom they were unable to retain possession of the field of battle after the victory was theirs.†

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 871, "Micel sumor-lida com to Readingum." Æthelweard, IV. p. 514: "Advenit sine numero æstivus exercitus in loco Readingon."

† Asser, p. 477.

This was a bitter lesson for the young prince; in spite of all his exertions, he had not succeeded in staying the wild ravages of the Danes, but, on the contrary, was obliged to retreat still further than before. Besides this, the country was exhausted, and no longer capable of raising any considerable levies, as, during the space of one year the people had fought, in the valiant endeavour to defend their own, no fewer than eight pitched battles,\* not to mention the numberless skirmishes which had taken place almost uninterruptedly by day and night. It is true that, during this time, whole multitudes of Northmen, with one of their kings and nine dukes, had been slain, but the Saxons also had lost many a valiant warrior, and the dread of the continually increasing numbers of their foes destroyed the courage of the people, who were accustomed to a more peaceable occupation than that of wielding the sword. The consequence of this was that, before the year was expired, Alfred, having first obtained the consent of his nobles, saw himself reduced to the degrading necessity of inducing the heathens by a sum of money to conclude a treaty, by which they engaged to leave the West-Saxon territories. As Alfred was now no longer in a condition to assist his brother-in-law, King Burihed, the Danes invaded his dominions, and,

\* Asser, p. 477. Æthelweard, IV. p. 514, "*Certamina tria, excepto supra memoratis bellis*"—namely, at Englefield, Reading, Ashdown, Merton, and Wilton; of three, therefore, we know nothing. "*Chron. Sax.*" A. 871. Henric. Huntingd. V. p. 739. Matth. Westm. A. 871, speak of nine battles.

crossing the Thames, took up their winter quarters in the vicinity of London. The helpless monarch could offer no resistance, and he and his subjects thought that they were saved, when, towards the end of the year 872, the enemy were induced, by the payment of tribute,\* to conclude a treaty, and depart, as they had come, by water.

But the Christian inhabitants of the island were still often doomed to learn how little they could rely upon the oaths and treaties of these pirates. It is true that the ships of the latter left the Thames, and sailed towards the north, along the eastern coast. Their crews then landed in the Northumbrian states to reinstate on the throne Egberht, who had begun to reign there under their protection, but had been driven from his uncertain position by a rising of the people. As soon as they had effected their purpose, and the winter was passed, they again appeared in the Mercian territory, in the district of Lindsey, where they made themselves masters of the place called Torksey. Once more the Mercians readily offered them money, imagining that they would observe the treaty; but hardly had a year passed before the heathen forces set out from Torksey, and, without the slightest hesitation, or meeting with any resistance, penetrated into the very heart of the Mercian dominions. Hreopendune (now Repton in Derbyshire) fell, it appears, into their hands, without a

\* Æthelweard, IV. p. 514. "Myrcii confirmant cum eis fœderis pactum stipendiaque statuunt." This is what is always meant by Asser's "pacem pangere."

blow being struck in its defence, and the celebrated monastery there, in which the former kings of Mercia were buried, was razed to the ground. The unfortunate King Burhred, who, six years before, had not had the courage to oppose them with his people alone, and who knew that his suzerain and relation, the young King of Wessex, was at present not less humbled and weakened than himself, immediately took to flight. After the fall of his kingdom, over which he had reigned two and twenty years, he had not even sufficient resolution left, on seeing the mournful condition of his native island, to entertain the slightest hopes of being again restored to his position. One consolation—that of the pious Catholic—was left him; he hastened across the sea, and wandered as a pilgrim to far distant Rome. Like Ceadwealh, two centuries previously, he had hardly reached the goal of his only wish, after a long and wearisome journey, when, far from his home and from the throne he had lost, he was snatched away by death in the year 874. His countrymen then in Rome buried him as befitted his rank, in the church dedicated to the Virgin, and connected with the Saxon school.\* His wife, Athelswith, who was a true companion to him through good and evil, had not been able to overtake him in his rapid flight, and most likely subsequently found a safe retreat with

\* The "Chron. Sax.," Æthelweard, Asser, and Henric. Huntingd. all agree with regard to the events of the years 872-874, the first two authorities are perhaps a little more minute than the others.

her brother, until she set out, at a later period, for Italy, to visit her husband's grave.

Such was the end of a kingdom which, for a long period, had disputed the supremacy with the West-Saxons. Its precipitate fall, as well as the death of its last ruler, must have produced a deep impression upon Alfred; he saw the old plans and aspirations of his race vitally endangered, and his own sister doomed to a life of sorrow, after having been deprived of her husband and her crown.

The lot of Mercia, as might have been expected, was a similar one to that of the neighbouring states to the east. The Northmen thought fit to set up a tributary king, for these restless conquerors themselves manifested but little desire to settle down for any length of time; they still continued to follow the course of the winds and waves, in the hope that these would prove favourable, and waft them to the possession of fresh treasures. The person who allowed himself to be nominated to the dishonourable office of their dependant was a weak-minded Thane of the fugitive King,\* Ceolwulf by name. Faithlessly did he swear the oaths required of him, and provide the hostages demanded. He vowed that he would be ready, any day that his capricious masters might desire it, to lay down his uncertain power, promising meanwhile to exert himself, to the utmost of his means, only for the good of their army. As long as he fulfilled his

\* "Hie sealdon Ceolwulfe ânun unwisum cinges þegne myrena rîce," "Chron. Sax." A. 874, which is here our most accurate authority.



promise of managing matters for the advantage of the Danes, as long as he extorted from the countryman the produce of his field, and robbed those monasteries which had not been destroyed, of their treasures, he was enabled to maintain himself in his position, but when, in the course of a few years, his rulers imagined that they remarked a coolness in his zeal for their interests, they deposed him without the slightest compunction, despoiled him of all he possessed, and left him to perish in the most abject want.\* A large portion of the country now passed entirely into their hands, and many of them settled down to a peaceable life, especially in the towns and larger villages. It is a well-known fact that some of these places laid aside, in the course of time, their old names, assuming Scandinavian ones instead, and, during the Middle Ages, for several centuries afterwards, many of the component elements of the people and their language betrayed, in those parts of the country at least, their northern origin.†

In the year 875 a division of the principal army took place. As soon as spring had returned, the Danes panted once more for the restless life they led on their marauding expeditions, and, besides this, it was impossible for so large a body of men to find the means of subsistence much longer at Irependune. One party, therefore, under Healfdene, set off towards the north, and pitched their camp at the mouth of the Tyne, while their bands

\* Ingulph, p. 870.

† Compare Lappenberg, p. 314.

ravaged the neighbouring country in all directions with fire and sword. As, however, there was but very little more treasure left among the Angles, the attacks of the Danes were now principally directed against the Picts and the Celtish population of Strathclyde, a state that stretched from the Clyde along the western coast to the south, and also embraced that tract which was afterwards Cumberland. The poverty of the land was so great as to oblige Healfdene to parcel parts of it out among his warriors, whom he compelled to cultivate it, in order that they might gain the means of supporting life.\*

The second party, headed by Guthorm—who found neither repose nor contentment in his Anglian government—Oskytel and Amund, set off towards the south, and settled for the winter in Cambridge. During their stay there, these crafty leaders devised a plan by which they hoped to crush their most determined foe, the King of the West-Saxons, and make themselves masters of his extensive dominions. In the spring of the year 876, they suddenly left their camp, and, embarking secretly during the night on board their vessels, which were always ready to sail, landed unexpectedly on the coast of Dorset. By a sudden attack they gained possession of a place called Warham, which at that time scarcely deserved the name of a town, and consisted principally of the straggling buildings composing a nunnery. But as the water was always the best bulwark of these

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 875. Simeon Dunelm. "De Gest. Reg. Angl." p. 681.

pirates, its position was exactly what they wanted for their rapacious ends, as it was enclosed by two small rivers, which flowed, at a short distance thence, into the sea. The place was open only towards the west, from which point they could repel the attacks of the Saxons, or ride out on their plundering excursions. This last they did without further delay, ravaging most fearfully a considerable tract of the surrounding country. The year before, Alfred had sailed, at the head of a small fleet, into the channel, and victoriously engaged seven of the enemy's vessels, one of which he took and put the others to flight, but at present he was compelled by his exhausted resources, and the diminished courage of his people, to confine himself to smaller enterprises, and was no longer a match for the overpowering forces of the enemy, led on by the three Sea-kings. He, therefore, determined once more on offering them money to leave the country. As soon as the rapacious heathens beheld the gold they promised to fulfil every one of the conditions he proposed. According to the ancient custom of all Teutonic races, the king himself was allowed to choose as hostages from the invading army, those persons who appeared to him most worthy to answer with life and limb for the observance of the treaty.\* He then personally received the oaths of all the Danish leaders, with the most solemn ceremonies. He first made them swear by the bones of his saints, and in attributing to these as, in his character of

\* "Chron. Sax.," Æthelweard, Asser, Florent. Wigorn., A. 876, confirmed by a charter in Kemble, N. 1069.

a good Christian, Asser tells us he did, the greatest efficacy next to God in the matter of oaths, he was far from being an exception to the general rule. Had not this been the case, we could only have designated it as an act of pious folly on Alfred's part to imagine that by such a proceeding he could compel the heathens to act honestly towards him; but it has been proved that all Indo-European races, and especially the Scandinavians, believe that men's mortal remains possess supernatural power,\* and therefore no one has a right to laugh at Alfred's credulity in this matter. He also prevailed on the Northmen to perform a still more solemn ceremony, which up to that time they had refused to do for any other nation. This ceremony was as follows;— Upon the altar lay a holy bracelet smeared with the blood of the various animals that had been offered up as sacrifices, and upon this they swore the most dreadful and binding form of oath known to the nations of the north.† In this manner, certain forms were observed which were originally characteristic of both parties, only that the Saxon when using them thought as a Christian, while the heathen merely followed the superstition of his ancestors.

But Alfred ought, by this time, to have known how little all treaties with such foes were worth,

\* Compare J. Grimm, "Geschichte der Deutschen Sprache," p. 150.

† See the instances of this form of oath among the Scandinavians, in Lappenberg, Translation, II. p. 49, from Arngrim Jonas "Rer. Island." I. p. 7, and from the Edda, in Thorpe, "Florent. Wigorn." I. p. 93, and in J. Grimm's "Deutsche Rechtsalterthümer," pp. 50, 896.

and how often their most sacred promises had been broken. The very night which followed the solemn scene we have described, large bodies of the Danes set out from Warham, and happening to fall in with a troop of Saxon horsemen, attacked and cut them to pieces.\* As a great part of the Danish army was mounted, they proceeded rapidly through the neighbouring country, penetrated into the district of the Defusaetas, and made themselves masters of the town of Exeter. Built not far from the sea, and connected with it by a navigable stream, this place was, like Warham, which the Danes had by no means given up, most excellently situated for their expeditions. These were most intimately connected with the marauding excursions of their countrymen upon the Continent. The narrow strait was no obstacle to them; they plundered at their ease the Frankish seaport towns; and Rollo, who was afterwards the conqueror of Normandy, appeared nearly about this time in England to repose there for a winter from the fatigues of his excursions.† On every coast the sea was covered with the vessels of these daring pirates, and as sure as anything was to be undertaken against a Christian state, fresh multitudes, lured by the hope of plunder,

\* "Henric. Huntingd." V. p. 739, is the only one who says that their departure took place the next night. Asser only mentions the Saxon troopers, p. 478.

† This piece of information, Asser, p. 479, was added by a later hand in the MS. Cotton. probably from the false annals which bear Asser's name; it is printed in Gale, "Script. Rer. Angl." III. p. 165. Can it be derived from the "Chron. Turon." in Du Chesne, "Script. Norman," p. 26?

came to join the invaders. As in their frail barks these indomitable hordes triumphed over the perils of the raging sea, so did they, by their fury, everywhere vanquish in battle their opponents, who, although better disciplined, had, from their long practice of the arts of peace, become less resolute.

Alfred, however, was not yet conquered; as long as there was breath in his body—as long as he had a man and a ship left for the defence of his country, he could still hope—he could still act. For some time past, he too had turned his attention to the sea, and perceived that it was there that the real strength of the enemy lay. As soon as ever he could prove a match for them on that element, he would be enabled once more to raise his people's courage and adopt more efficacious measures of defence on land. After the oaths had been broken he did not delay one moment longer taking the field, although the numbers of the enemy were so inexhaustible, that if thousands of them were slaughtered one day, twice as many seemed to rise up, as if out of the earth, the next. At the end of the winter 876–7, he collected all the forces which he had left him: he himself, with one party, hastened by land to Devonshire, and prepared to besiege, and, if possible, cut off from all communication with their countrymen, the Danes who then held Exeter. Meanwhile, he had manned his ships with the most daring sailors he could collect from along the coast,\* and ordered them to put out immedi-

\* Or does Asser, p. 479, by the expression, "piratis," really mean to say that Alfred manned his ships with pirates? In the Intro-

ately into the Channel and keep watch, so as to capture every supply of men or provisions which might be intended for the Danes who were settled in his kingdom. He also commanded them to venture confidently on a regular naval engagement as soon as they felt strong enough.

Faithfully did the sailors obey the orders of their king. The remainder of the garrison at Warham had not embarked until the spring of the year just mentioned, when, trusting themselves to the waves in a hundred and twenty vessels, bristling with armed warriors, they had directed their course towards the West, in order to convey help and succour to their countrymen in Exeter who were now sore-pressed. But, on this occasion, the elements that were usually so favourable to them, proved adverse: a thick fog\* lay upon the water, while violent storms, peculiar to the time of year, lashed the raging waves mountains high, so that for a whole month the fleet was tossed about without being able to put into port. It was in the midst of this untoward state of things that Alfred's mariners boldly attacked the enemy—their fleet, scattered by the storm, could offer no resistance. The crews of some of the ships were slaughtered by the Saxons,

duction I have already remarked that I suspect the passage: "*jussit longas naves fabricari per regnum*;" it seems to be misplaced. "*Chron. Sax.*," and Florence, first mention the ships being built in 897. In his whole kingdom Alfred could not at that time have built a ship; he was obliged to have recourse to the most desperate expedients.

\* In the "*Chron. Sax.*," A. 877, it is described very graphically; "*ða mette hie micel myst on sæ.*"

but the majority of the vessels drifted on the rocks of Swanewic, where they were dashed to pieces, and, together with their contents, swallowed up by the waves.\*

Meanwhile, the Danes in Exeter were reduced to the greatest extremities. When they saw that no help arrived, they sought Alfred's permission to depart under certain conditions, giving him as many hostages as he chose to demand, and once more swearing numerous oaths. It was not before the month of August, 877, that they took their departure from Exeter,† and set out towards the North. One party proceeded to Mercia, and another to Gloucester, the only portion of the country which was freed from their presence, being that to the south of the Thames. Up to this time

\* Asser is the only writer who says anything about a sea-fight; all the other authorities say the fleet went down in a storm. *Æthelweard's* peculiar expressions: "elevant vela | dant vento carinas | procella ingruit tristis | mergitur pars non minima | centum numero carinæ | supremæ juxta rupem | quæ Suuanauic nuncupatur," sound as if they had been transferred, word for word, from some Anglo-Saxon ballad.

† "Chron. Sax." A. 877: "on hærfeſte." All our authorities for the years 876 and 877, with the exception of the simple story in "*Henric. Huntingd.*," are chronologically doubtful, springing without the least order from one thing to another. This confusion arose from the faulty way in which the short notices in "*Chron. Sax.*," which the later chroniclers have copied, followed one another. The destruction of the hundred and twenty ships is even twice mentioned in Asser, the second account being introduced in the later manuscripts out of the so-called "*Annales Asserii.*" This is another proof of the almost incredible manner in which the text has been altered.



Ceolwulf had retained his contemptible office in Mercia; but the Danes now deprived him of a great portion of the kingdom in order to settle there themselves. Meanwhile, the Vikings, who had established their footing in Gloucester, united their forces with those of another body of their countrymen who had landed a short time previously in Demetia, a small state in South Wales. At the head of this fresh fleet was a brother of Ingvar and Healfdene; his name is not mentioned, but we have reasons for supposing that he was Ubba. The new-comers had expected to find sufficient to satisfy their rapacity even among the poor Celts of the mountains, but they were soon undeceived, and they now probably excited the bands who had left Exeter a short time previously, to take part in a new and united expedition against Wessex. The voice of conscience was in all likelihood drowned by the hope of gain, for the faithless Northmen cared as little for the fate of their hostages, as they did for their oaths. In this manner, then, at the commencement of the winter, partly on the north-western confines of the kingdom, partly upon the West-Saxon territory itself, were collected the elements of a frightful storm, which, in the spring of the great year of 878, was destined to burst with terrific fury on the heads of Alfred, and all the inhabitants of his kingdom.

As had been the case with the expedition which started from Warham the year before, this fresh attack also was made by sea and land at the same time, and principally directed against the western

districts of the kingdom, which, till then, had suffered much less than the others. While the nameless sea-king we have mentioned, put to sea with three-and-twenty of his ships,\* after having first slaughtered great numbers of the Christian Welsh, and stripped the poor wretches of what little property they possessed, the land forces,† which had probably received, during the winter months, a considerable addition of strength by reinforcements from Mercia, invaded the territory of the Wiltsætas, and obtained possession of the royal castle of Chippenham, situated on the left bank of the Avon. From this point their hordes spread over all the neighbouring country, carrying desolation wherever they went. They covered the land as thick as locusts, and, like these, sucked out its very marrow.‡ There was now no longer any heroic Ealdorman to assemble under his banner the people once so brave, who were now a prey to fear and consternation. Whoever could flee, took with him the few moveables he possessed, and hastened to the sea-coast, to seek a place of refuge in the opposite country of France. Bishops, priests, and monks, especially, used every means in their power to convey the relics and jewels of their various religious foundations into a place of safety. All who remained behind were doomed by their cruel oppressors to servitude and

\* Æthelweard says thirty: "cum triginta moneribus."

† According to more recent authorities, as early as Christmas, "Asserii Annales," p. 166, "post Theophaniam," and "Gaimar," v. 3125, "Puis, el Noel, li felon Daneis," &c.

‡ Henric. Huntingd. v. 739: "operientesque terram quasi locustæ."

beggary.\* Both public and private affairs were rapidly approaching a state of dissolution.

Meanwhile, the ships had disembarked their crews in Devonshire, where a number of the king's faithful adherents had thrown themselves into a fortress called Cynwith. Under the command of Earl Odda,† they fought valiantly with the Danes, retiring behind the walls of their castle, when their opponents became too powerful for them in the open field. Although the fortress was very little calculated for defence; consisting, probably, as was customary at that period, of nothing but an earthen rampart, it was, as we are told by Asser, who had seen the place with his own eyes, admirably fortified by Nature herself on all sides except the east. The consequence of this was, that the Danes, after beginning the siege, saw themselves gradually undeceived in their idea that they should be able to compel the besieged to surrender from want of provisions, for although the latter suffered the most horrible privations from the scarcity of water, there being no well in the castle, they still held out bravely; they had resolved to conquer or to die like heroes. In the twilight of the morning, they suddenly rushed out from their intrenchment, and falling unawares on the heathens, who were not prepared for the attack, slew the greater portion of their army, together with the nameless sea-king. Only very few, who fled in the wildest confusion, reached their

\* Asser, p. 480; Æthelweard, IV. p. 515; Roger de Wendover, I. p. 329.

† Mentioned by Æthelweard only.

ships, which were drawn up at no great distance, on the beach. About a thousand Danes lay slaughtered around Cynwith.\* According to one tradition, which seems to partake strongly of fiction, among the trophies which fell into the conquerors' hands, was the celebrated standard of the heroes of the North, which Regnar Lodbrog's three daughters wove one morning for their brothers Ingvar and Ubba. In the middle of this standard was the holy bird, which, when the result of the battle was favourable, used to flutter his wings, as if he were alive, but hung down motionless whenever the Danes were threatened with a defeat.†

But this brilliant victory, achieved by a handful of undaunted men, was the last valiant attempt at defence. Their bravery was followed by no advantages, for the country had long been overrun, in its entire length and breadth, by the hordes of the invaders, carrying death and desolation wherever they went. The king, too, was no longer with them, and in no part of the country did those capable of bearing arms, assemble in defence of their hearths and homes, of their wives and children. The en-

\* Asser, p. 481, who gives the most detailed account, says 1200; the "Chronicle," and Henric. Huntingd. 850, and Æthelweard, "80 Decades."

† This has been introduced into the faulty manuscripts of the Vita, from the "Annales," which have been spuriously inserted, and contain little that can be relied on; but four MSS. of the "Chronicle," B, C, D, E, have the short notice: "And pær was se guð-fana genumen þe hie ræfn hétan." Compare what is said concerning a similar banner, in "Encomium Emmæ," ap. Maseres, p. 16, and Langebek, "Script. Rer. Danic." V. p. 95.

feebled and terrified people everywhere bent their necks to the yoke of servitude, while those who still hoped, or had anything left to save, sought to escape to foreign countries, inhabited by Christian populations, who willingly afforded the fugitives protection and help. But in addition to this universal state of despondency and general emigration, there was another evil which raged in the very heart of the unfortunate country, and aided the enemy in reducing it to the brink of ruin. Besides a knowledge of the state of things at that time, and of the manner in which almost all the West-Saxon districts were taken by surprise, we possess the significant notice of an old historian,\* to prove that, in the hour of such danger, the most violent dissensions existed among the people. In all probability the consciousness of a difference of origin seized on this opportunity of once more bursting forth. The descendants of the Celts in the west recollected that their possessions had formerly been taken from them by the sword, and now, beholding their conquerors menaced with a similar lot to themselves, did not feel in the least inclined to unite with them in the common cause. On the contrary, they even took a kind of revengeful plea-

\* Æthelweard, IV. p. 517, writes under a more recent date, viz., the year 886; "*Ælfrædo, quem ingenio, quem occurso non superaverat civilis discordia sæva, hunc ut redemptorem susceperunt cuncti.*" [The meaning of Æthelweard is itself obscure; and as he is the only authority for these supposed dissensions among Alfred's subjects, the circumstances related in the text admit of considerable doubt.—ED.]

sure, as has already been remarked, in submitting to the Northmen, although they must in reality have hated them, and often suffered from their treachery. Besides this want of confidence in his British subjects which obscured Alfred's prospects of defence, he probably perceived a want of unanimity at work in his Teutonic provinces, aiding their fear in the task of ruin. By far the greater majority of those who had not the courage to quit their native soil, or to retire into the woods and pathless wastes, and see the property that they had received from their forefathers delivered up to the flames, preferred cultivating the land with the sweat of their brow, for the greedy plunderers. They saw how their Anglian neighbours were still settled on the old spots, and still spoke the old language, after long years of oppression, and they also saw how the insurrections and valiant appeals to arms of different individuals, had only brought down greater misfortunes on their heads. No commands, no prayers, no entreaties, from their once so beloved king, could induce them to sacrifice their little property, or hazard their life and own well-being, in order to ensure the existence of the whole state. In most parts of the country, too, there was no earl, noble, or bishop, who would resolutely put himself at the head of his march or diocese, and by his daring example, induce them to venture on one last and desperate struggle.

But is it credible that this universal despondency and helplessness broke out so suddenly as first to bring matters to a crisis in the unfortunate year

878? The people had now been fighting almost uninterruptedly for the last ten years; and while the numbers of the enemy were continually increasing, those of the islanders were falling off every year. It has already been noticed that since Alfred ascended the throne, he was no longer in a condition to undertake any important enterprise, and that he could no longer command the same resources which he possessed at the battle of *Æscedune*. During the last few years especially, the strength of the country must, for the reasons just mentioned, have been sensibly diminished. The story of a more recent chronicle, which has been joyfully adopted by a modern biographer,\* is therefore an absurdity. It is to the effect that, after the last attack of the Danes by land and sea, which all our authorities look upon as two separate attacks, but which, notwithstanding, must be considered as forming but one and the same, Alfred hastily assembled all his forces, and was defeated by the Danes in a pitched battle at Chippenham. No older historical work contains the slightest allusion to such an event, and Bromton's account, as is so often the case with him, is founded simply on a mistake in the dates, and the consequent confusion of facts. Besides this, Alfred's heroic reputation would not be increased by it. On the contrary, his greatness as a monarch consists far

\* Dr. Giles, "Life of Alfred the Great," VII. p. 184, et seq., prides himself very much on his discovery in "Bromton," p. 811. But does he gain anything by it, even supposing he could prove its authenticity?



more in his having been the only person who, at a period when all around fell to the ground, after a long course of gradual decay, set himself about the work of reconstruction without abandoning his hopes of ultimate success. That such was the view taken of the matter by our oldest authorities, will be shown in the following pages.

After the Danes, setting out from Gloucester, had extended their inroads further south, after the valiant defenders of Cynwith, of whose fate we unfortunately hear nothing more, had captured the Northern Banner, and while the heathens, who were mostly mounted, rode through all the West-Saxon districts, compelling the inhabitants to submit to their authority, there was still one man\* who would not yield, and who withdrew from the sight of his friends as he did from that of his foes. This man was Alfred, the king without a crown, but still the guardian and protector of his kingdom. If, in the moment when everything deserted him, he had given up that trust in God in which he had daily and hourly exercised himself through a long series of trials; if, in his despair, he had sought and found death; or if he had still counted upon the pity of the perjured heathens, and, under the most favourable circumstances, died, perhaps, like the last King of the Mercians, a pious pilgrim in Rome, then, with him, had perished also the

\* Four words of the "Chron. Sax." A. 878, sound immensely great from their dry simplicity: "And *þæs oðres (folces) pone mæstan dæl hie geridon, and him to gecirdon, buton þam cyninge Ælfrede.*"



thought that England must remain true to the Christian faith. The original British inhabitants would never have saved Christianity, nor would the monks, who, after the destruction of their monasteries, wandered about separately as fugitives through the country, or settled as hermits in solitary wastes, have produced, by their preaching, any impression on the minds of the rude barbarians who, brought up in the midst of cold and storm, still remained attached to their grand and terrible gods of Asgard and Valhöl. On the spots formerly dedicated by the Saxons to the now extinct worship of Woden, blood-stained sacrifices would once more have been offered up to Odin and to Thor. Now, too, that its leaders and teachers had disappeared or lost their power, the Christian population, reduced to a state of submission, would have begun by abandoning themselves to many a remnant of their old superstition, to which their hearts still clung, and, gradually giving up the blessings of their conversion, turned once more to the altars of the false gods on which their conquerors sacrificed.

But Alfred still lived, and with him the deep-rooted consciousness that he had been selected by a kind Providence to be the defender of his people, the champion of the doctrines of the cross, and the saviour and upholder of the Saxon race. Animated by this conviction alone, he was enabled to repress every thought that arose in his heart concerning merely his own safety and that of those who were nearest and dearest to him by the ties of blood or of fidelity. At the moment of his

utmost need, when he saw his country laid waste, and his people deserting him, and bending beneath the yoke, his sure eye pointed out the spot in which he might conceal himself, and whence, with a few followers, he might issue forth to resume the interrupted strife.

Accompanied by a very few followers, of whom Athelnoth,\* the Ealdorman of those parts, is the only one mentioned, he sought a refuge in the pathless and unfruitful country of the Sumorsætas, in the midst of marshes, standing water, rushes, and brambles, where, at that period, agriculture had scarcely begun to dispute the possession of the soil with the wilderness. He was followed by his wife and children, and perhaps by his mother-in-law, his sister, and the remaining members of the royal house of Wessex, who patiently suffered with him every privation and every hardship.

There is one fact which recurs, at intervals, in the history of the world, namely, that the deliverance of a whole kingdom, and the expulsion of foreign conquerors, proceeds from some remote province, from some barbarous and impassable district. On the narrow mountain ridge of the Asturias did Pelayo, the last scion of the Goths and the wonder-encircled hero of Spain, pave the way, immediately after the fall of his people, for the liberation of the peninsula from the Moors, although that liberation

\* Æthelweard, IV. p. 515, has again preserved his name. He is the same person who, according to "Chron. Sax." and Æthelweard, in the year 894, distinguished himself in this same part of the country. Compare Lappenberg, p. 318, n. 3.

was not completely effected for seven centuries afterwards.\* From the eastern limits of Prussia first resounded the cry to arms which was followed by the expulsion of Napoleon's hosts from Germany. It is a beautiful and cheering fact when, after the lapse of centuries, a grateful people remembers the district whence its preservation from a great danger proceeded, and which was the cradle of its liberty.† It is for this reason that, at the present day when Alfred is mentioned in conjunction with his sufferings and his acts, the Englishman still fondly directs the stranger's attention to the remote county of Somerset.

In this inhospitable district, then, were Alfred and those with him doomed to pass several of the winter months. It is impossible for us, at the present day, to form any distinct notion of the various privations to which they were there exposed, but we can easily believe that only very scanty means of subsistence were to be found in the midst of the marshes. Asser‡ informs us that the king and his little band, consisting of a few noblemen, warriors,

\* I find this noble idea of the "Anglo-Saxon Chronicle" repeated by Mariana, "Historia de España," lib. vii. c. 1. "Solo el infante Don Pelayo, como el que venia de la alcuña y sangre de los Godos, sin embargo de los trabajos que avia padecido, resplandecia, y se señalava en valor y grandeza de animo."

† "Ostenduntur ab accolis loca singula, in quibus vel malæ fortunæ copiam vel bonæ persensit inopiam."—Will. Malmesb. "Gest. Reg. Angl." II. § 121.

‡ And Florence, in the same words; that Alfred fought with Christians also, "qui se Paganorum subdiderant dominio," appears to me to refer to some former case of defection.

and vassals, were sometimes compelled to make a sortie on the Danes, or even those Christians in the neighbourhood who had submitted to Danish rule. On these occasions, they used to obtain, either by stealth or in open combat, a little food, a portion of which they set aside to sustain their own life, while they carried the rest to their wives and children, whom they had left behind in the bush. Alfred, who was, perhaps, thought by the Danes and the vanquished Saxons to have disappeared for ever, led a life of want and danger which, in sober truth, was little fitted for a king.

The charm natural to this state of contrast opened a wide field for fiction, and it is, therefore, not at all surprising that, after his deliverance, an endless number of stories, all stamped with the impress of fable, have sprung from the accounts the people received of the dangers to which their king had been exposed. Man, especially when animated by gratitude, is fond of ornamenting with additional incidents, both the oral and written accounts depicting the sufferings endured before any great act of deliverance, and he loves to elevate the unadorned beauty of simple truth by the creations of natural poetry. If, centuries afterwards, the English people, in its love for physical courage and independence, could find such ample materials for ballads and stories in Hereward, the last of the Saxons, who, in the marshes of the island of Ely, so long defied William the Conqueror, or, if it could so delight in the bold yeoman, Robin Hood, who drew his bow in Sherwood Forest, protecting the poor and punish-

ing the arrogant, the reader will easily believe that a similar kind of poetic glory must have surrounded the Saxon king when he suddenly reappeared as a conqueror from the wilds of Somerset, and especially as soon as the dangers that had been incurred by him were known. Posterity treated him as it does every hero of ancient or recent times.\* The Middle Ages certainly enjoyed the additional advantages of having a mine of miracles at their command, with which they could equip a popular hero as well as they could a saint.

With regard to the various stories, however, which we possess concerning Alfred's residence in the lowlands of Somerset, there is a very perceptible difference between those which sprang from the mouths of the people, and those in which the monks made their saints play a part. The origin of both dates in the order in which they are here mentioned. And it is an instructive lesson to contemplate their development and completion, even though we are obliged, from the very beginning, to give up all hopes of finding the least truth in them, and desire to see all fiction excluded from accredited history.

Among the legends of the first class we have mentioned may be reckoned the following, which is first met with in the "Life of St. Neot," that is at the end of the tenth century, and which next

\* We need only remind the reader of Frederick the Great. In his "Neun Bücher Preussischer Geschichte," II, p. 246, Ranke mentions one of his adventures, which has assumed the form of a legend.

finds its way into the "Annals," and thence into the more recent manuscripts of "Alfred's Life." \*

One day, the king happened to be in the hut of one of his cowherds, who faithfully treasured up in his heart the secret of his sovereign's retreat. During the time that the cowherd was gone to his work and his wife was engaged in baking bread, the stranger had taken up his seat by the fire, and busied himself in mending his bow, arrows, and other warlike weapons. The woman, who took the stranger, from his needy appearance, to be some serf or other who was a companion of her husband, charged him to mind the loaves on the hearth. On her return, after a short absence, finding her bread all burnt, she rushed angrily at him, and began scolding him as follows:—

"Holloa! thou varlet!

Dost thou not see that the loaves burn? why then dost thou not turn them?

Ready enough art thou always to eat them hot from the baking!"

The hexameter, which has crept into the prose narration, is of itself sufficient to render the authenticity of the latter doubtful, but at the same time seems to prove that the whole was at some time a popular ballad. The pious reflections which the anonymous biographer of St. Neot tacks on to the story tend but little to render it more worthy of belief. According to this biographer, the king, in the insolence of youth, behaved, during the first years

\* Asser, p. 480. "Life of St. Neot," in Saxon, by Gorham; "History and Antiquities of Eynesbury and St. Neots," l. p. 259.

of his reign, very arrogantly towards his subjects, neglecting their petitions and complaints with great harshness. At this, his relation, the holy Neot, who was then living, felt deeply grieved, and in a spirit of prophecy, foretold the days of misfortune that would subsequently overtake him. But Alfred paid no attention to him until the Divine Judge had punished his folly with the inflictions we already know, and humbled him to such a degree that, after being driven from his throne and deprived of every necessary, he was ill-treated in the very place where he had found a refuge.

The story contains, of itself, nothing improbable, and it may very well have been one of those which Alfred himself, in happier days, used to relate to his well-loved Asser and his other friends.\* But the fact of Florence not knowing it, is a sufficient proof that it did not exist in the genuine "Vita." It is, however, a remarkable circumstance that this chronicler seems, in one instance, to allude to its true origin. On the occasion of his mentioning the elevation of Denewulf to the see of Winchester, we are told that this man, if report is to be trusted,† was unable to read until he had attained

\* "Solebat ipse postea, in tempora feliciora redactus, casus suos jucunda hilarique comitate familiaribus exponere."—W. Malmesb. II. § 121. Compare Lappenberg, Translation, II. p. 53, n. 2.

† Florent. Wigorn. I. § 97, "Si famæ creditur;" the "Res digna miraculo" appears still more puzzling if Denewulf was transformed in the lapse of a single year from a swineherd into a bishop. The "vaccarius" in the "Vita Sti. Neoti," and in Asser, is also "subulcus" and drives his "porcos ad solita pascua,"



an advanced age, and that he had formerly been a swineherd. The account proceeds to state that when Alfred was an exile in the woods, he became acquainted with Denewulf as the latter was driving his hogs to fatten on the acorns. His natural talent attracted the attention of the king, who provided for his instruction, and afterwards raised him to so proud a position. We have here an instance of the manner in which fable plays with facts and persons, obtaining such full possession of both that all idea of our ever arriving at a knowledge of the real state of the case is utterly out of the question.

According to another story, after having assembled a band of his brave companions in exile, and commenced his fortification at Athelney, Alfred, accompanied by only a single devoted servant, proceeded to the camp of one of the Danish kings. Here he delighted the Danes by his skill in the songs of his native country, and, during a stay of several days, even penetrated the secrets of the royal tent, where, with his own ears and eyes, he became acquainted with the plans of his foes. On his return from his reconnoitring expedition, he carefully assembled his followers, and, leading them silently on to the attack, obtained a brilliant victory over the heathens.\* All this is very possible, and, from Alfred's known partiality for song,

in Roger de Wendover, I. p. 330, who, in other particulars, follows the story of the pseudo-Asser.

\* Ingulph. p. 869. Will. Malmesb. II. § 121. Guido apud Alberic. A. 880.



perfectly explicable, but our old authorities, which are founded on Saxon tradition, do not mention the circumstance. It is merely in the Norman authors that we find something of this kind related of King Alfred, and a similar fact is afterwards recounted of the Dane, Anlaf, who, also, was said to have penetrated into the camp of King Athelstan disguised as a harper.\* In addition to this, the spirit which pervades this poetical story is rather a mixture of Scandinavian and Norman than Saxon.

It is in another class of fables—namely, those invented by the church, that we must place the legend which emanated from the north of England, and rather tends to the glory of the miracle-working Cuthbert than to that of the proscribed king. According to William, Alfred himself used to relate how the holy bishop appeared to him and helped to effect his deliverance. In this instance again, the king was at Athelney in great want. His companions had gone to fish in the neighbouring stream, and he was sitting in his habitation with no one to keep him company but his wife. Bowed down by the weight of care, he was endeavouring to comfort his soul with the Psalms of David, when a poor man appeared at the door and begged for a piece of bread. Full of the liveliest pity, the king received him as if he had been Christ himself, and shared with him his last loaf and the few drops of wine which were left in the flask. Suddenly the stranger disappeared,

\* Will. Malmesb. II. § 131.

leaving the bread untouched, and the flask filled to the brim with wine. A short time afterwards the king's companions returned from the river laden with a large quantity of fish which they had caught. The following night, St. Cuthbert appeared to him in a dream and informed him that his sufferings were now at an end, foretelling him the very place and hour of all that was going to happen. Early the next morning, the king arose and crossed the river in his skiff to the dry land. He then blew his horn three times, whereby he encouraged his friends and alarmed his foes. That same afternoon, a band of five hundred warriors had gathered around him. He related to them the commands of God and his saint, and thereupon they marched to victory.

Such is the account contained in the legend of the holy Cuthbert. Its conclusion seems to warrant the supposition of its having been written during the time of King Edmund I., in the last half of the tenth century, soon after the monks of Lindisfarne and Durham, who had for a long period wandered about the country, carrying with them the miracle-working bones of their patron saint, had once more found a resting-place. But how little historical knowledge on which any reliance can be placed had then penetrated into the northern parts of the kingdom concerning Alfred, may be gathered from the fact, that the king is represented as having remained three whole years concealed in the marshes of Glastonbury.\*

\* "Hist. St. Cuthberti," Twysden, pp. 71, 72. It is from this

In William of Malmesbury,\* the legend of the Northumbrian saint assumes a somewhat different form. According to this author, the saint appears without any previous notice to the sleeper and makes him a set speech, to the effect that he and the country have atoned for their sins, and that, in a short time, the exiled king shall once more be seated on his throne and the people again free. As a sign that God has not abandoned him, the saint informs the king that those who had gone out to fish shall return with their nets full, although the river is covered with ice. On Alfred's awaking, he finds that his mother,† who has been sleeping not far off, has also dreamt the same dream. They are both lost in astonishment at this wonderful occurrence, when those who have gone to fish return with their heavy burden, which is sufficient to satisfy a whole army.

In other accounts it is St. Neot who appears, by night, to the king in a dream, and urges him as soon as he shall have atoned for his sins and suffered the punishment imposed by Heaven, to rise

source that Simeon "de Dunelm. Eccles." II. pp. 10, 14, derives his information, though only in the extract: "Quoniam alibi plenè per ordinem scriptum habetur." New traits are continually introduced by Ailred of Rievaulx and J. Bromton, ap. Twysden, pp. 353-355, and p. 811.

\* "De Gest. Reg. Angl." II. § 121. Similarly, Ingulph. p. 869.

† This cannot possibly be Osburh, as is stated in Lappenberg, p. 319: the more ancient authority mentions Alfred's wife. It is, perhaps, his mother-in-law, Eadburh, whose name is handed down by the legend to posterity.

quickly and take fitting vengeance on the foes of his Country and of his Faith.

The historian may reasonably be allowed to abstain from all investigation of this variously fashioned legend; its ecclesiastical origin is evident. Availing itself of Alfred's distress, of his charity, and of his firm faith, it connects him with the saint whose fame then penetrated, perhaps, for the first time into the southern part of the island. Possibly, it owes its origin to the presents that Alfred may, perhaps, afterwards have made the church at Durham, or those which his descendants actually did make. But it is time for us, after this excursion into the dominion of fiction, to return to history.

The Easter\* of the year 878 had arrived. Nature was beginning to revive from the deadening sleep of winter, and the few valiant hearts that still firmly believed in the possibility of their yet freeing their native country beat higher as she awoke. The king and his companions left the huts and lurking-places in which they had sought a refuge from the winter's cold and the pursuits of their foe, and, proceeding to a spot which was admirably fitted by its natural position for the purpose, united all their energies to throw up a fortification. Under the name of *Æthelinga-eig* (contracted into *Athelney*, that is: the Island of

\* The Easter of 878 fell upon the 23rd March. All our authorities draw their accounts of the following events from the "Saxon Chronicle," and agree with one another in the principal points, as well as in the chronological succession of events.

Princes) this spot has since become famous as the point from which Alfred set out to reconquer his dominions. The island was situated near the Somerton of the present day, to the east of the Parret, where the latter unites with the small river Thone,\* and consisted of an eminence rising up from the marshy land around, which latter was frequently laid under water by the sea. The inaccessible nature of the place needed but very little additional strength from the hand of man, and even at the end of the seventeenth century, the conformation of this district rendered it decidedly unfavourable to any military operation.† That Alfred, however, chose this spot with the quick glance of an experienced general, and that he himself lived there for some time, is proved not only by the historical works on the subject but by the remarkable jewel bearing the King's name, which was discovered there in aftertimes, as well as by the pious establishment which he founded out of gratitude on this tower of his hope. Both will be mentioned more fully in their proper place.

It was, undoubtedly, in his stronghold of Athelney that Alfred again unfolded his banner with the golden dragon, which had formerly glistened in the battles against Mercia and the Britons, and which, in its contest with the northern raven, had only retreated after a long resistance. As soon as the people of the neighbouring country perceived it, and heard that the King was still alive,

\* Lappenberg, Translation, II. p. 53.

† Compare Macaulay, "History of England," I. p. 604.

they all hastened joyfully to him, and courage began to return to the faint-hearted. The chiefs of the Sumorsætas especially distinguished themselves by being the first to join Alfred with their followers, and by the active part they took in the expeditions which were constantly undertaken against straggling parties of the Danes. The little band was kept constantly employed, and was soon destined to form the sturdy nucleus of a larger one. Besides this, the foe had to be taught that they were not yet in undisputed possession of the country, and the disheartened inhabitants of the other Saxon provinces had to be informed of their approaching deliverance, and invited to fly to arms themselves. After a short space of time had elapsed and his restless activity had been crowned with the success which he anticipated, Alfred thought that the moment had arrived for him to proceed to an open attack. In the seventh week after Easter, that is between the 5th and 12th of May, he marched out from his fortress, on an appointed day, to Egberhtes-stan (Brixton) situated in the eastern part of Selwood Forest,\* which, in those days, stretched like a solid boundary to the east of Devonshire and Somerset. Hither flocked from the adjoining counties the Sumorsætas, the Wilt-sætas, and all the inhabitants of Hampshire that

\* Instead of "sealwudu," the Willow Wood, Simeon Dunelm. "De Gest. Reg. Angl." p. 681, has "mucelwudu," which appears to be a correction of the false translation in Asser and Florence: "silva magna," in Welsh, "Coitmaur." Or is, perhaps, "seal, sêl," an adjective, meaning "great?"

had not fled beyond the seas, with their weapons in their hands.\* With cries of joy did they hail their beloved king, who, after a long series of sufferings, had risen, as if from the dead. Alfred, who once more saw an army assembled around him, allowed them to repose for the night. On the next day, however, he set off, with the first red streaks of morning, towards the north-east, with the intention of immediately attacking the Danes, whose fixed quarters were still in Chippenham. The army rested, the following night, at a place called Eglea, and then proceeded without further delay until, at mid-day, they came upon the foe near Ethandune.† The whole army of the heathens was there, having hastily assem-

\* Gaimar, v. 3168, actually gives the names of several noblemen :

“Co est del hest de Selewode.  
 Ceolmer vint contre le e Chude,  
 Od les barons de Sumersete,  
 De Wilteschire e de Dorsete.  
 De Hamteschire i vint Chilman,  
 Ki les barons manda par ban.”

We find, however, no confirmation of this list anywhere else, and the name of Ceolmer, that immediately follows Selewode, looks very suspicious, and seems to have originated in a mistake with regard to the Celtish Coitmaur, found in Asser.

† I take the liberty of copying the description of the time from the Norman author of the “Rhyming Chronicle,” v. 3189 :

“E lendemain, a hure de none  
 Done sunt venuz a Edenesdone.”

According to Simeon, Alfred does not reach Ethandune until “post tertium diem,” and is engaged, from sunrise during a great part of the day. Ethandune is probably found again in Eddington, near Westbury.



bled on the first intelligence of the King's reappearance, and being determined to defend their booty against the rightful possessors. A most desperate struggle now began. Alfred led on his troops in a very close line of battle,\* and after having, thanks to this plan alone, courageously withstood, for a long space of time, the impetuous attacks of the Northmen without being compelled to give way, gained a complete victory over the foe. Multitudes of the latter were cut down as they fled from the field of battle, and when the conquered army reached its castle, by which, in all probability, we must understand Chippenham itself, a great many were made prisoners, before the very gates. The victors captured also a number of horses and cattle. The prisoners were instantly put to the sword, and Alfred then began to besiege the place.†

This was, indeed, a glorious change of fortune, brought about with a degree of suddenness which is very rarely to be met with in this life. A banished king, who had been looked upon as lost, was in a few days transformed into a victorious general, and the same man who a short time before had been compelled to conceal himself in the wilds, now saw his subjects joyfully flocking to his banner, and, what was more gratifying than

\* Asser: "Cum densâ testudine atrociter belligerans."

† Later writers, such as Bromton and Gaimar, make Ubba fall before Chippenham, but in the course of the preceding year. They found their statement on a tumulus which bore the name of Ubbelow.



anything else, held the flower of the foe, with their most dreaded king at their head, closely shut up in their castle.

The siege had lasted a fortnight when the heathens, reduced by hunger, cold, and fear, and brought by want to a state of the most abject despair, begged that Alfred would give them leave to depart. They proposed that he should select from their ranks as many hostages as he chose, while they, on the contrary, did not demand a single man of him. This was an extraordinary concession by which the Danes owned that they were conquered. They also promised to keep their word, which they had so often broken, more faithfully than they had done on previous occasions, and to leave the kingdom without delay. Alfred, who felt for the fate of these unhappy men,\* once more took their hostages, and once more put faith in their oaths. Had he not also received, however, another and a far surer guarantee, he would, perhaps, once more, bitterly have repented the evil consequences of his premature confidence in heathen vows. But Guthorm, who commanded the Danish army, and was by far the most powerful of all the Vikings then in England, sent to inform the King of the West-Saxons that he was inclined to embrace the Christian religion. We meet with nothing which can be construed into an indication of Alfred's having made this determination one of the conditions of peace. The first idea of such a thing, although it might not

\* Asser: "Suâ ipsius misericordiâ motus."

have been sincere, but merely suggested by the straits to which he was reduced, appears to have arisen in the soul of the heathen. He himself ruled over Christian subjects, who showed more courage for their religion than they did in war, and already, too, were the first signs of that so frequently recurring phenomenon apparent, namely, that the Christian religion generally triumphs, in the course of time, over the weapons of its oppressors. To no one could such a convert be more welcome than to Alfred, who was fighting not merely to regain his authority, but also to maintain the religion of his people, and, therefore, he must have seized with joy the occasion of the first of the Danish kings declaring his intention of embracing this religion. He immediately consented to the treaty, and the Danes were allowed to depart towards the north. Seven weeks\* afterwards, Guthorm, accompanied by thirty of the noblest of his army, appeared in Alfred's camp, that had once more been removed to the district of the Sumorsætas, and was then fixed at Alre, a place not far from Athelney.

It must have been a proud and exciting hour for Alfred, when, with all the pomp of the church, he acted as Guthorm's godfather, and adopted him by the Saxon name of Athelstan; his country was free, and his most powerful enemy had become a Christian. This was indeed the greatest triumph his resolute heart had ever enjoyed. Guthorm with

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 878, iii., "wucan" seems to be a slip of the pen.

his followers, who, like their prince, had also been baptized, remained twelve days in the Christian camp, the solemn loosening of the baptismal bands, which ceremony had been performed by the Ealdorman Athelnoth, having taken place on the eighth day at Wedmor.\*

The meeting of the two princes, which took place in the first days of July, had also another object. Not only was the way paved by the baptism, in a spiritual manner, for the arrangement of all differences, and for the friendly intercourse of these two German races, but their objects were settled according to the law of nations, by a worldly treaty. It is true that Wessex was freed from the Danes, but no one was strong enough to drive them from all the other parts of England as well. It was, therefore, a wise thought of Alfred to leave the newly-baptized sea-king in those Anglian territories which he had called his for some years past; and this settlement of the Danes proved afterwards a real benefit to the island, by gradually uniting the two people by the same bonds of religion and constant intercourse. At Wedmor, where the first West-Saxon Witenagemot† was held after the days of oppression, the following conditions, which we possess at the

\* Asser, "Octavo die"—"Chrism-lising," "Chron. Sax." "Chrismatis solutio," Asser and Florent. Wigorn. is, without doubt, the same as Æthelweard's: "Dux pariter Æthelnoth abluit post lavacrum eundem in loco Vuedmor," and Gaimar's: "a Wedmor furent desaleez."

† Kemble, "The Saxons in England," II. p. 251, assumes this as a certainty.

present day, were agreed to.\* Alfred and all Witan of the West-Saxons, on the one side, and Guthorm and the rulers and inhabitants of East-Anglia on the other side, agreed that the boundaries of the two countries should run from the mouth of the river Thames along the little river Lea, up to its source, and then turning to the right towards Bedford, run up the Ouse to Watling-street. By this arrangement, a considerable portion of Mercia fell to Alfred's lot, and was thus preserved from Scandinavian influence. The remaining conditions of peace, containing the outlines of the rules for the international intercourse, were taken from the laws of custom of the two nations, which were derived from the same sources in both instances. For homicide, especially, the same sum of blood-money was fixed, and precise rules laid down for the legal course to be adopted in other cases of dispute, which could not fail to recur frequently with an army settling down to colonise a country. During the reigns of the descendants of the two kings, other clauses were introduced in the treaty, concerning ecclesiastical matters.

On the twelfth day after the ceremony of baptism, Guthorm and his followers took leave of Alfred, who loaded them with presents.† The Danish

\* "Ælfredes and Guðrumes frið" in "Ancient Laws and Institutes of England," ed. Thorpe, I. p. 151, *et seq.*

† Asser's "Multa et optima ædificia," is very properly altered into "Beneficia," by Lappenberg, p. 321. The "Sax. Chron." also says: "And he hine miclum and his geferan mid feo weortude." Henric. Huntingd.: "Multa munera." Simeon Dunelm.: "Multa dona."

King rejoined his people in Cirencester, where he remained with a great number of them quietly encamped during the year 879, but all those who would not become Christians put themselves, according to one account, under the command of the powerful Hasting, and crossed the seas.\* According to the stipulations of the treaty that had just been concluded, the whole army was bound to have left Mercia immediately, but Alfred himself does not appear to have desired their instant departure, or, perhaps, indeed, he had not the power to enforce it. Besides, his whole thoughts and energies were fully occupied at home in again raising what had been thrown to the ground. It required more time and trouble to re-join old bonds and relations that had been snapt asunder, than it had done to conquer back the country. Guthorm, too, who had grown up in predatory expeditions, both by land and water, could not sufficiently control himself so as to lead a quiet life in his principality, as befitted a Christian sovereign. The insatiable thirst for treasure and adventures tempted him as strongly as it ever had done, and inspired him with the hope of being enabled to satisfy it somewhere else.

The mighty flood, with which the sea-faring hordes of the north inundated at that time the whole western portion of Europe, was far from having subsided, and many a bold Viking, with his untamed hordes, was still destined to carry distress and fear into the Christian states of the Continent, and the

\* Will. Malmesb. II. § 121, and, in the same words, Elinand. in "Alberic's Chron." A. 880, ed. Leibnitz.

breasts of their restless princes. It is true that the heathens now and then met with disastrous reverses, but experience soon proved that no defeat could drive them away altogether. Although Alfred had so recently chastised and expelled them from his kingdom, he was obliged very shortly afterwards to hold himself in readiness to meet fresh attacks. His recently achieved victory, however, appears to have inspired the foe with some degree of respect for him, for a large body of them, which had come up the Thames in the year 879, and settled at Fulham, sailed back again, at the end of the winter, to the Low Countries. Their leader, the dreaded *Hasting*,\* who for a great many years past had filled the Frankish coasts, together with the provinces of the interior, and even the shores of the Mediterranean, with his terrible name, thought it would be more prudent to seek for booty in the territories of the Carlovingians.

With what attention the Saxons at that period followed the devastations committed by their foes, is very evident, during the next few years, from the short notice to be found in their annals. The land of the Franks, beginning at Ghent, was fearfully ravaged, and the work of desolation was carried along the rivers Maas, Schelde, Somme, and Seine deep into the heart of the country. Condé and Amiens were laid waste, and decisive battles

\* The sources of information for a history of his expeditions are all collected in Lappenberg, p. 321, n. 3. It seems to me highly probable that he was at Ethandune and Chippenham, and that he came from Cirencester, by sea, to Fulham.

fought at Haslo and Saucourt.\* At this same time, the sea was everywhere infested by pirates, and Alfred, always indefatigable in his exertions for the welfare and the defence of his native land, did not hesitate, with the few ships he possessed, to put to sea in person and defend his coasts from being plundered. An engagement took place at a distance from land, with four Danish vessels. The Saxons fought bravely, and captured two, the crews of which they put to the sword. The other two vessels held out longer, and only surrendered to the King after their crews could wield their weapons no more, on account of the number of blows and wounds which they had received.†

How could the newly-baptized Athelstan be supposed to accustom himself to the arts of peace, which he had never known, when he heard the old war-cry everywhere resounding from the sea? His union with his countrymen, the flower of whose forces swarmed round the Frisian and Frankish coasts, was far from being dissolved by his conversion to Christianity. It is true that he had, in the beginning of the year 880, retired with his army into East-Anglia, and had, in accordance with the stipulations of the treaty of Wedmor, entered into possession of the authority to which he had now a lawful claim, and portioned out the territory among his followers. But a camp could not be trans-

\* "Chron. Sax." from A. 880 to A. 885, with which compare the Frankish histories, Hlinemar, A. 880, and "Annal. Vedast." A. 880, Pertz, M. G. SS. I. pp. 512, 518.

† "Chron. Sax." A. 882.



formed into a state, far less the nature of the former pirate changed so suddenly. Before Guthorm had been obliged to yield to Alfred's victorious arms, and abjure Paganism, Isembart, a near relation of the French Carlovingians, who had been compelled to fly on account of a feud with his king, had experienced a hospitable reception at Guthorm's hands, and accompanied him on his expeditions through the West of England. After peace had been agreed on and concluded, the results of the war required his presence on the Continent, whither Athelstan did not hesitate to accompany him on his enterprise. The faithless vassal and the newly-converted heathen exercised as great atrocities with fire and sword, as the most unscrupulous among those who had been the last to leave the north. At length they met with a well-merited punishment from Louis III., at the battle of Saucourt.\* On this, it is probable that Guthorm-Athelstan immediately returned to his kingdom; but a number of the vanquished Northmen having again appeared, a few years afterwards, on the coast of Kent, Alfred's suspicions that the ruler of East-Anglia was still mixed up with their proceedings was confirmed by fact. In the summer

\* "Guido ap. Alberic," A. 881, and "Chron. S. Richarii, ap. Bouquet," viii. 273. The fabulous Gormo of Saxo Grammat. lib. ix. and "Gorm hin Enske" (Gorm Engelaender), who is baptized in England, in the "Chron. Erci Regis ap. Langebek Scriptt. Rer. Danic." I. p. 158, Gurmund in Will. Malmesb. II. § 121, and Alberic, and Guaramund in the "Chron. Rich." is, without doubt, one and the same person. The Anglo-Saxon form of the name is Guthrum, but I have adopted, as Kemble has done, the pure northern form: Guðorm, that is, battleworm.



of 885 they had landed near Rochester, and began to besiege the castle, at the same time that they surrounded themselves by a rampart. The old inhabitants of Kent suffered a great deal at their hands. The Danes were still working at their fortifications when Alfred drew near with his levies, for the purpose of defending Kent, which after the victory of 878 had returned to its old allegiance, from this and all future attacks. The heathens did not venture to resist him, even from behind their fortifications; but, hastily embarking on board their vessels, put off to sea. Their horses and prisoners fell into the hands of the Saxons.\* Meanwhile, however, Athelstan and his people had openly broken the peace of Wedmor. Their perjury was first made apparent by their failing to fill up the gaps which had occurred from death or other reasons, among the hostages in Alfred's power, and by their uniting, at Beamfleet (Benfleet) in Essex, with a division of the fleet that had been driven away from Rochester, and recommencing with them their former lawless mode of life.† Alfred, who was still stopping in Kent, collected and manned his

\* "Chron. Sax." Æthelweard, IV. 516. Asser, p. 483.

† Lappenberg, p. 326, n. 1, was the first to endeavour to connect Æthelweard, IV., 516, where almost every word is a riddle with "Chron. Sax.," A. 885: "Se here on Eastenglum bræc frið wið Ælfred cyning." His judgment is far preferable to that of the editor of the "Mon. Hist. Brit." p. 516, n. d., who is of opinion that the period in question formerly belonged to the year 894. Certainly Æthelweard's Chronicle has reached us in a lamentable condition, but it is impossible that it can have been composed in such barbarous and unmeaning Latin.

fleet, which was near at hand, in order to punish the faithless Athelstan, whose godfather and ally he had formerly become, for violating his oath. The fleet was ordered to show no pity, but to treat the East-Saxon and Anglian coast exactly as if it were an enemy's country,\* and to do it as much harm as possible. In the mouth of the Stour they met sixteen of the Viking's ships. A desperate engagement took place, in which the heathens were defeated and totally destroyed. Their vessels, and the treasures which were found in them, were carried off by the victors. The latter were in the act of leaving the mouth of the river to return home when they were suddenly attacked by the East-Angles and other Vikings, with a superior number of ships, and had the mortification of seeing the victory, which they had scarcely achieved, wrested from their grasp. These differences might have been attended with serious consequences for Alfred and his people, especially as Guthorm appears to have called in the aid of a powerful ally. This was no other than the celebrated Rollo, who, immediately after the siege of Paris, hastened over the Channel to assist his old brother-in-arms.† We

\* "Chron. Sax.," 885, Asser, p. 483., Florent. I. p. 100; the "prædandi causâ" of the two latter does not alter my opinion. Alfred had every right to plunder the inhabitants of the country in question, the moment they appeared as enemies.

† This fact is supported by Norman writers alone, Dudo, p. 78, Will. Gemet, II., p. 4 (both in Duchesne), Wace, Roman de Rou, V., 1364, et seq., ed. Pluquet. Lappenberg, p. 327, first cleared up the mistakes of the historians of the Middle Ages, who mention Rollo as concluding an alliance with Athelstan, Alfred's grand-

are not told whether any further attempt was made to decide the matter by arms, but according to the records of those days, England seems, on the contrary, to have enjoyed for several years the blessing which it had not enjoyed for so long, namely, a perfect freedom from the attacks of the Danes. Guthorm-Athelstan remained, until the end of his life, in possession of East-Anglia, while the Christian religion rapidly gained ground among his subjects. Alfred himself lived long enough to see his idea of establishing peace and civilization, through the settlement of the Danes in the country, crowned with success.

But there was also another part of the country where the King had to adopt measures to make good the injury occasioned by the ravages of the northern barbarians, and to secure, as far as possible, the intellectual and material welfare of the old Teutonic population. The large portion of Mercia which the Danes were compelled to evacuate after the peace of Wedmor, was much more closely united to Wessex than East-Anglia, over which Alfred enjoyed but a very uncertain supremacy when he ceded it to Guthorm. The boundary-line, which we have mentioned, does not determine where the northern independent Anglo-Christian population came in contact with the heathen Scandinavians. The great strength, however, of this element, which was properly the pith of England, was to be found in the West, especially in that part of the country

son, or even with the King himself; Alstemus, Alstan, Athelstan is no other than the baptized convert, Guthorm.

which is now Worcestershire, and which, from the days of the first immigration, was inhabited by the sturdy Anglian race of the Hwiccas. During the sovereignty of the Mercian kings, founded on the union of several petty landed chiefs, this district had frequently distinguished itself by the valour of its inhabitants, under the sway of a race of hereditary rulers. Its position obliged it to defend the borders of the kingdom against the Celtic Welsh, and it must, after the latter had recognised Egberht as their sovereign, have been of no small importance with regard to the interests of Wessex. Alfred fully acknowledged the truth of this as soon as he had recovered his authority. He succeeded in selecting such men as could, by their assistance, enable him to preserve this district for his house. Athelred, the Ealdorman and hereditary chief of the Hwiccas, was entrusted with the vice-royalty of all Christian Mercia, and bound in the ties of relationship to Alfred by a marriage with his daughter, Athelfled. A complete amalgamation, however, of the Anglian and Saxon provinces was as yet entirely out of the question; and the task of destroying with a hand of iron the ancient differences between the West-Saxon and Mercian rights and usages, was reserved for William the Conqueror and his descendants. In pursuance of this arrangement, Athelred, who immediately after the departure of the Danes, in 880,\* began to take an active share in his suserain's service, appears as a sovereign prince in those parts,

\* See the record in Kemble, N. 311, A. 880, Ind. V.

assembling the Diet and confirming its resolution, although always subject to the approval of the King of the West-Saxons. Faithfully and resolutely did he always fulfil his duty, restoring to the districts with which he was entrusted, the repose and peace with which they had long ceased to be acquainted. By his side stood Werfrith, the excellent Bishop of Worcester, who exerted himself in his holy office with similar activity, and was, in addition to this, united to his King by the bonds of their common love of labour. We must, without a doubt, ascribe to the unwearied exertions of these two men the fact of the Scandinavian influence not having subsequently penetrated into the middle of England; their labours, however, as well as the scanty accounts we have received concerning their lives, belong to the following section, from which only the unconnected military operations that followed the expulsion of the Danes, had to be omitted, in order that we might gain an uninterrupted view of our Alfred in his public and private capacity during the few happy years of peace that he enjoyed.

## SECTION V.

## ALFRED'S LABOURS IN CHURCH AND STATE.

“AMIDST the deepest gloom of barbarism,” says a great historian,\* “the virtue of Antoninus, the learning and valour of Cæsar, and the legislative genius of Lycurgus, shone forth united in this patriot king.” And this is true. It is in vain that we search the history of ancient times, as well as that of the Middle Ages, or of more recent days, for a portrait like the one here presented, in which the same noble features appear in such perfect harmony; our admiration in fact changes to astonishment if we reflect how a man could be adorned with such great qualities, when, for nearly the whole of his life, he had to contend against the most adverse circumstances; and we find that a comparison with Frederic the Great, or Charlemagne, will not go far in enabling us to form a more lively idea of this eminent King of the little kingdom of Wessex.

In the preceding pages, we have seen how Alfred struggled, ventured, and won: endowed with the courage of a Cæsar, but also with true German

\* Gibbon, in his very remarkable youthful work: “*Outlines of the History of the World*,” *Miscellaneous Works*, III. p. 3, ed. 1814.

powers of endurance in times of distress, and with extraordinary valour at the critical moment. We have likewise beheld how, after his days of trial and suffering, he laid the foundation, with his sword, of more happy times in his island. At present, however, he enters the lists against the foe armed far differently than before, for he purposes retaining by an advanced state of civilisation, what he has conquered by the sword. There is a great deal of justice in the comparison with Lycurgus, which we have quoted, especially in relation to the political conformation of England at that time; but the picture is too general and too distant, and we are therefore, compelled in the course of the following considerations, to cast an occasional glance at the contemporaneous and kindred races of the Continent.

As, in the extensive territories that were governed by the descendants of Charlemagne, a number of Teutonic races, resting on a foundation of conquered nations, were amalgamated into various large states, so also, in England, had the subordination of many Teutonic and Celtic tribes, under one supreme head, gradually been taking place for several centuries. Hardly, however, had the various petty states been united by the bond of union, before they suffered, at the hands of kindred barbarians, a severe blow, the lasting effects of which threatened them with destruction. The fate that was in store shortly afterwards for the Franks, and which was partially occasioned by Rollo's victories in Neustria, namely, the breaking up of their monarchy into a number



of separate governments, ruled by mighty dukes and barons, was, unquestionably, nearly being the fate of England as well; and whole centuries would then have elapsed ere the country would again have been united. We must ascribe it to Alfred's patriotic spirit alone, to his courage and his penetrating glance into futurity, as well as to the brilliant successes achieved by his descendants, that the invasion of the Northmen was prevented from exercising any influence on the development of the Saxon element, until the heathen fierceness of these wild adventurers was cooled by the influence of Rome, and could be employed with the most gratifying results, to effect an amalgamation of the two elements.

What were the leading ideas by which Alfred was guided in his exertions? He had lived to see, with sorrow, the fall of the political edifice of the country, of which his grandfather had reason to be proud, but to whose maintenance his father had contributed very little. Was it not quite natural for him, on recovering power and reconstructing the government out of an old state of affairs that had proved worthless, to draw the reins tighter than before, and form a firm whole from the still uncertain union of the various petty states? A step of this kind was taken by Alfred, as far, at least, as we can gather from the few indications that have survived the lapse of several centuries, and the hero's measures have exposed him, even lately, to the charge of having begun, as an autocrat, to injure the ancient liberty of his people. The refutation



of this charge would here be out of place, for we must always believe in the existence of a paramount necessity, which, at that period, bent all the states of our great national family, from time to time, under its powerful arm, thereby drawing them closer to one another, and embuing them with fresh strength. What is understood by freedom now-a-days is vastly different from the independence of a number of communities scarcely civilized, and, during the course of history, has frequently been promoted by tyrants themselves. Did Alfred ever act more despotically than Charlemagne, Otto I., or Henry III., whose wise and severe energy we admire? No, it is with lively satisfaction that we are compelled to admire in all his actions the mild, though not on that account less effective, method adopted by him for remodeling previously existing institutions, and by the aid of which he assisted in placing royalty on a far different and far more real basis than that on which it had formerly rested. His innovations partake far less of a political than of an ethical nature, and it is astonishing to reflect how nearly he left the constitution as it was before, after all political ties had been dissolved, hastening, with a true knowledge of the dangers by which they were menaced, to save his people by elevating their moral condition; a course which none of the great princes just mentioned had been able to follow with equal resolution and enthusiasm. But, before this assertion can be justified, it is necessary for us to cast a glance at the constitution of the country, and at the part Alfred took in its restora-

tion. We have already given a short notice of the state of public affairs among the Anglo-Saxons at the time of Athelwulf. The kingdom of the dynasty of Cerdic had been brought, by the attacks of the Danes, to the very brink of destruction; very little change, however, took place in its component parts, after it had been saved by Alfred.

It is true that he had lost the supreme authority over the states on the east coast, but this authority had always been, even under Egberht, of a very uncertain nature, and his loss was, in some measure, compensated by Guthorm's conversion and settlement in the country. In other respects, the three tracts of territory which composed the West-Saxon state continued as they were before. Mercia, that was the first to fall before the northern hordes, had ceased to be an independent kingdom. A great portion of it having again become subject to Alfred, at the peace of Wedmor, he established a form of government there which differed essentially from that of his other provinces. Kent, and the districts pertaining to it, also became the booty of the enemy on the first attack; it possessed no natural means of defence. When, however, the conquerors were compelled to retire beyond the Thames, there was no possibility of an independent state in this province either; the old traditions of the Jutish princes were exploded, and the peculiar rights and customs remained unchanged for only so long a period as a distinct blood ran in the veins of the inhabitants. Alfred could never entertain an idea of attacking this nationality, for his own mother had belonged

to it, and no pretensions had ever been raised against his title as sovereign of the country. The custom of sending the heir-apparent to the people of Kent, as their king, had fallen into disuse under his brother's reign, and the union with Wessex was already much more palpable in those parts than it was in Mercia. The old provinces had been the last to succumb, and finally, it was from the western district, that had hardly ceased to be Celtic, and where the Saxon plough had as yet traced but few furrows, that the deliverance of the whole country had proceeded. Wessex once more formed the heart of the kingdom, for even the Britons, on whom no reliance could be placed, returned to their former allegiance, and never, as long as the Saxon hero lived, did they hazard a revolt, or threaten to become dangerous to their conqueror by an alliance with the Scandinavians.

But very few details have reached us of the manner in which Alfred governed these various provinces, among which, although they were of such trifling extent and separated by only unimportant obstacles in the nature of the soil, there existed so many dissimilarities in origin, language, manners, and customs. Our authorities mention many dukes, such as Athelnoth, Ealdorman of the Sumorsætas, Athelhelm, the Wiltsæta, and Athelbald of Kent, but their influence is far from being as great as it was in former times, even as late as Athelwulf's reign. They almost seem to have been nothing more than mere officers of the royal household, and the once hereditary supremacy that each

formerly exercised over his own district begins to disappear. There is no longer an Ealhstan to be found among the prelates, and however distinguished may have been some of the men whom Alfred appointed to the various bishopricks, he does not appear ever to have allowed them a greater share in public affairs than that which properly belonged to them. These are sufficiently clear indications of the kind of development his kingdom was now undergoing; it was he alone who had freed his native land, and he, therefore, was the person to reap the largest share of the fruits of his good fortune. There are no traces of any violent means having been employed; in fact it was but natural that the general safety rendered a closer union necessary, and no hand was more capable of forming this union than the one that had proved it could so valiantly wield the sword. The people raised no complaints about any infringement of their liberties. On the contrary, in later days, when the yoke of the proudest of conquerors weighed heavily upon them, they still looked back with unquenchable love to their favourite, and gratefully, although wrongly, ascribed to him every advantage, every beneficial arrangement which they still enjoyed. To this feeling must be attributed the belief prevalent in the twelfth century, that Alfred was the first to divide the country into shires, and these into hundreds and tithings.\* This mode of division, however, had existed as long as the Teutonic races had settled in the country, and

\* See the Normans, Ingulph, p. 870, and Will. Malmesb. II. § 122. Asser mentions nothing of the kind.

formed the real germs of the state; it merely underwent, at this period, an essential change in its character, and began to lose its politico-social significance for a local one, destined to replace the old distinctions of the Gaus and marks, which had lost their former importance. We are certainly justified in believing that, after the universal ravages of the enemy, and for the interest of the commonwealth as well as for that of private property, Alfred caused a fresh survey to be made of all the boundaries of the kingdom, although the assertion that he ordered a regular register to be drawn up, and all the land to be measured, seems to have emanated from the history of the Domesday-book.\*

The way was now paved for another important change, namely the separation of the administration of justice from the government. Up to this period, the earl and the ealdorman had administered justice in their districts, as the king had done at the diet, and we now find, for the first time, regular judges independent of the officers of state and the heads of the different provinces.† The earl and ealdorman enjoyed precisely the same dignity that they did before, but they were directed to confine their atten-

\* This point is excellently treated by Kemble, "The Saxons in England," I., pp. 247, 248.

† In a Record, of the year 884, in Smith's "Bede," p. 771. The authenticity of this, however, is certainly doubtful. We shall have occasion to speak of the "judices" of Asser subsequently. There is an important passage of Ingulph, p. 870: "Præfectos vero provinciarum (qui antea vicedomini) in duo officia divisit, id est in judices, quos nunc justiciarios vocamus, et in vicecomites, qui adhuc idem nomen retinent."

tion more especially to the public affairs of their districts, and particularly to its defence, and all the necessary military measures.\*

At the Diet, or Witenagemot, the public affairs were discussed, according to the old custom, by those who had the privilege of so doing. The nobles and freemen in the various Gaus,† may also have continued to assemble for themselves, although the importance of all such local meetings must have been diminished at the same time that the power of the dukes was circumscribed. The Diet, both among the Saxons and Angles, was no longer confined to one particular season of the year, and we never find any mention of a March-field or a May-field. As often as circumstances required it, the nobles and freemen of the kingdom repaired to the king at his villa, or some other suitable place, and deliberated together on the public business.

At present we know of only two West-Saxon Witenagemots held during Alfred's reign; in the year 878, the treaty with Guthorm was concluded at Wedmor in the presence of the Witan, and between the years 880 and 885 there was a meeting of the nobles and freemen of the country at Langandene, where King Athelwulf's dispositions concerning his property were approved of, and the

\* This is perhaps meant by the "custodes regni constituit," in Roger de Wendover, I., p. 363.

† [Gau is an old German word, signifying the union of a number of marks or manors, together, for judicial or other purposes; it is equivalent, or nearly so, to the Saxon *scír* (shire), which Mr. Kemble considers to have been in England merely a modern substitute for it.—ED.]

measures adopted by Alfred with regard to his estates ratified.\* These Witenagemots afford convincing proof how different was then the power of the king, from that subsequently enjoyed by the Normans and Plantagenets, and it was the recollection of the free and national elements which Alfred had always fostered, that alone caused men to rise up against the encroachments of these monarchs, and begin the conflict which ended victoriously in the establishment of parliaments. Alfred never did more than what the necessities of the country required from him, and measures of centralization had already been taken in the south of England long before his time. He certainly did not think of restoring what had fallen through its own weakness, and could only gain strength again by union, but when he found that there was still life in the old state of things, he contented himself with infusing into it fresh activity. He even suffered the continuance of divisions in the separate portions of his kingdom. We are struck with wonder when we reflect by what an organic development, carried out into the minutest details, the empire of Great Britain has attained its present importance !

The spirit of the age required, then, that a marked degree of difference should still continue to exist between Wessex and Mercia. Both language and constitution still formed a sure boundary line between the Anglian and the Saxon population, and, besides this, a portion of Mercia was

\* Kemble, "Cod. Dipl.," N. 314, and "Saxons in England," II., p. 251.



attached to a race of native princes. These are the reasons for the separate administration of the country, and the high position occupied by the Ealdorman Athelred. We find him characterized as viceroy, governor, and administrator of the kingdom of the Mercians.\* His wife, Alfred's eldest daughter, Athelfled, was in every way equal to him, both in rank and political importance. She was not only the prince's wife (*cwen*), but herself enjoyed the right of a sovereign (*hlæfdige*, lady) which the old Mercian custom allowed her to exercise. As Burhred's marriage had already made evident the nature of the bond which existed between the two states, so do Athelred and Athelfled prove the existence of a still more intimate union, for they are no longer distinguished by the royal title; Alfred himself is King of Mercia. Nothing is done there without his consent; every resolution, every donation, every grant of land, must have his approval. If, as far as we are aware, no misunderstanding or dispute ever occurred between Alfred and his duke, this is not to be attributed only to the near relationship in which they stood to one another, but is most satisfactorily accounted for by the honourable character of the son-in-law, who was devoted, heart and soul, to his lord and king, whose wise ideas and plans he understood, as well as Alfred himself, and never, for the sake of

\* "Subregulus," Florent. I., p. 113, and even "rex," Æthelw., IV., p. 518: "Merciorum gentis ducatum gubernans, procurator in dominio regni Merciorum," "Cod. Dipl." N. 1066, 1068, but also "comes," Asser, p. 489, and Florent. I., p. 101.



his own importance, thwarted Alfred's measures for the union of his kingdom.

By a great piece of good fortune we possess a far more extensive knowledge of the constitution of the Mercian territories at that period than we do of that of Wessex. We have far more records relative to Athelred's administration, and they afford us much more interesting explanations of many particulars, than in the case of those concerning Alfred himself. In many of them, which were agreed on, or approved of, by the Mercian Diet, we find various minute details referring to the latter itself. There was a Witenagemot under Athelred's presidentship in the year 883 at Risborough: another was held in the year 888; and in the year 896, a full assembly was held at Gloucester. There was also another, of which the precise date cannot be ascertained with the same degree of certainty, and, in a testamentary deed drawn up by Bishop Werfrith, mention is made of a Diet of the kingdom soon after Athelred's accession to the head of affairs (880?)\* The manner in which the members proceeded, and who was entitled to take a part in the proceedings, is evident from a deed executed at Gloucester, and which, also, on account of the rest of its contents deserves to be translated from the Saxon original, as presenting us with a true picture of the mode of transacting business on such occasions. It is as follows:—

“ In the name of Christ, our Lord and Saviour!

\* See Kemble, “The Saxons in England,” II., p. 251, and, “Cod. Dipl.,” N. 1066, 1068, 1073, 1075, 327.

After eight hundred and ninety-six years had elapsed since his birth, in the fourteenth Indiction, the Ealdorman Athelred summoned all Mercian Witan to Gloucester, Bishops, Nobles, and all his Manhood,\* and he did this with the knowledge and consent of King Alfred. Here they took counsel how they should administer the Commonwealth in the justest manner before God and the World, and many men, ecclesiastics as well as laymen, treated with one another about lands and many other things which concerned them. Then Bishop Werfrith addressed the assembled Witan, and declared that all the forest land which belonged to Wudu-ceastre and the usufruct of which was formerly given for ever by King Athelbald at Worcester to Bishop Werfrith as drift and cutting, had been taken possession of; and said that it had been taken partly at Bislege, partly at Afeningas, partly at Scorrastane, and partly at Thornbyrig, as he believed. Then all the Witan answered that right must be done the church, as well as every one else. On this, Athelwald (Ealdorman?) took the word and said that he had no wish to oppose what was right, that the Bishops Aldberht and Alhhun had formerly treated for the same thing, and that he was always willing to allow every church its share. And thus he charitably ceded it to the Bishop, and ordered his vassal Eglaf to ride thither with Wulfhun, the priest of the place (Gloucester?): and he

\* "Bisceopas and aldermen and alle his dūguðe;" the last word is very expressive of the "virtus" of the Middle Ages, namely, "Manhood."

made him draw out all the boundaries as he read them in the old books, and as King Athelbald had formerly marked them when he made a present of the land. But Athelwald still wished the bishop and the diocese to allow him the use of the land as long as he lived, and his son Alhmund. They only wanted it in fee, and he hoped that no one would rob either of them of the right of hunting that was granted to him at Langanhryege at the time when God gave him the land. And Athelwald spoke the word, that any one would always possess it contrary to the grace of God, whoever possessed it besides the lord of that church, with the exception of his son Alhmund; and that he would observe the same friendly agreement with the bishop as long as he lived. If it happened, however, that Alhmund would not acknowledge the convention; or if he were declared unworthy to possess the land, or, thirdly, if death should overtake him sooner, then the lord of the church should enter into possession, as the Mercian Witan had decided at their meeting, and as the books proved to him. This was settled with the consent of the Ealdorman Athelred, and of Athelfled, of the Aldormen Athulf, Athelferth, and Alhhelm; of the priests, Eadnoth, Alfred, Werferth, and Athelwald; and of his own relations, Athelstan, and Athelhun, as well as of Alhmund, his own son. And so the priest of the place and Athelwald's vassal, rode through the land, first to Ginnethlæge and Roddunbeorg itself, then to Smececumb and Sengetlege, then to Heardanlege, that is also called Dryganleg, as

far as Little-Nægleslege and Athelferth's land. Thus Athelwald's man showed him the boundaries, as the old books fix and prove them." \*

Bishop Werfrith, who has been already mentioned, is the highest ecclesiastical dignitary of the country; he takes—in his own affairs, it is true—the most prominent part, as it were, at the Witenagemot, and altogether occupies in the temporal government a higher position than even the Archbishop of Canterbury claimed at that period in Wessex. A long list of records, treating of donations and property left, prove what an active part he played in the territorial divisions of the country, and how zealously he attended to the landed interests of the diocese of Worcester.† The resolutions passed at Gloucester, are also signed by Athelfled, who probably sat on the throne by the side of her husband. There are also Aldormen, composing the highest class of the laymen, assembled to deliberate; as in Wessex, they represent separate districts, but nothing has reached us concerning their lives and actions.‡ A distinction is always carefully drawn between them and the remaining members, who were all freemen, proprietors of land, and who had a full share in the administration of public affairs. The clergy always appear to have been very distinct from the laity. In addition to Werfrith there are generally two other bishops, probably those of Hereford and Litchfield. This

\* "Cod. Dipl.," N. 1073.

† Compare "Cod. Dipl." N. 305, 315, 325, 327, 1071.

‡ "Cod. Dipl.," N. 1066, 1068, give their names.

Witenagemot offers us a far truer picture than any that is to be found up to this period in the whole course of Anglo-Saxon history. There is no doubt that the mutual relations between rulers, landed proprietors and serfs were, in the details, very similar in Wessex and Mercia, and we shall obtain a nearer insight into them when we come to consider their laws.

A circumstance of great importance to Mercia was that London, the ancient emporium of the whole island, was situated in its territory, at the extreme south-eastern boundary of the country, as had been settled at the peace of Wedmor. In consequence of this, in the year 880, Alfred installed there, too, the Duke of Mercia as ruler, after having first rendered the place habitable again by rebuilding the houses, as it had suffered frequently by being burnt and plundered. The last time this had happened to it was at the hands of the Danes, who had landed at Fulham.\* It would appear that Alfred had again been obliged to lay siege to London. Perhaps a band of Northmen were still established among its ruins; but when all the Angles and Saxons, who in the preceding years had spread themselves abroad as fugitives, or groaned under the dominion of the Danes, once more returned under his authority, the King himself undertook the restoration of their only important town;†

\* Asser, p. 489: "Londoniam civitatem honorificè restauravit et habitabilem fecit, quam genero suo Ætheredo Merciorum comiti commendavit servandam."

† "Chron. Sax.," Florent. I. p. 101, Æthelw. IV. p. 517.

and this name was, at that time at least, according to our present ideas, applicable only to London. Although we have no information as to its commerce and wealth until the following century, it may still be inferred from its previous importance in the days of British and Roman dominion, from the rapidity of its subsequent elevation, and from the unsurpassed advantages of its position, that there was a population there who industriously exported the productions of the country, wool and corn; and that foreigners from different nations on the Continent brought their cargoes to the great harbour, which was destined to rule the world. What was at that time the importance of all the other places compared with London? Marine trade was, perhaps, carried on at Exeter, Dorchester, Werham, Dover, and similar coast settlements; still these places were, like many others in the interior of the country, only in an incipient state; most of them owed their small growth to ecclesiastical foundations, as Sherburne, Winchester, Canterbury, Worcester, and also Gloucester; or to the occasional presence of the court, whence arose boroughs like Reading, Chippenham, Wantage, and others. Certainly, in many places the solid architecture of the Romans withstood the disinclination of the Germans to live in towns, and the ravages of the Scandinavians. Both people were ultimately compelled to retreat within these places of safety, or to besiege them. It was not until the extension of commerce and the display of greater magnificence at the royal court, and the episcopal sees, that the English towns upon the coast and in

the interior, again raised themselves. This development of so important a branch of the national mode of life, became perceptible during Alfred's reign; his people, certainly, noble and lordly, rich and poor, preferred the woods and fields to the enclosed and walled towns; and, besides this, the fields and flocks were a more productive source of gain than the unprofitable ocean.\*

Moreover, the King and his household had got no permanent residence; like his ancestors, he travelled about the country, proceeding from one royal castle to another, according to circumstances. Our knowledge of Alfred's presence at different places is, for the most part, certain only where warlike undertakings called him to his great duty. In the summer of 897 he was at Winchester, which was raised under his successors to the dignity of the Capital.† According to an old document, he stayed, in the year 898, at a place called Wulfamere; in the year following he had a conference with Duke Athelred, Archbishop Plegmund, and Bishop Werfrith,‡ at Celchyth: we must not conclude, however, from his signature of the Mercian documents, that he was on every occasion present at the councils held there.

\* [Dr. Pauli has, I think, underrated the importance of the towns during the Anglo-Saxon period. Many of them had outlived the wars of the first Saxon invasion, and had evidently preserved their Roman constitutions; and their continued importance is shown by the resistance they made to the Danes. We have no reason for believing that Canterbury, Winchester, Gloucester, &c., arose from ecclesiastical foundations.—ED.]

† "Chron. Sax.," A. 897.      ‡ "Cod. Dipl.," N. p. 324, 1074.



The signature of the King is simply : "Rex," or "Rex Saxonum," or "Dei Gratia Rex Saxonum." But his court already presented a picture of the increasing power and splendour of the monarchy—it may be clearly seen how the court officers originated from the national dukes and earls, how occasionally both are united, and how the proper court offices gained a definite form. In different years the names of the individual Ealdormen (duces), are met with ; they are, besides Athelred, the vassal king, Athelhelm of Wiltshire, Beocca, Athelwald, Athelnoth, from a Mercian district, Ceolwulf, Ceolmund of Kent, Wulferd of Hamton, Beorhtwulf of Essex, Ordulf, Wullaf, Garulf, and Byrhtnoth, some of whom not only, as formerly, governed their district, but appear to have been occupied in the service of the King, and merely to have borne the title. Thus, Athelhelm, the Ealdorman of the Wiltsætas, the Ealdorman Beocca, Sighelm, and Athelstan, whose position is not accurately known, were charged with missions to Rome. Two other nobles also, Wulfred and Athelred, bore neither the title of earl nor duke.\* There was also a royal treasurer (thesaurarius, hordere, compare Athelst. legg. I., 3), in the year 892, called Alfric, a marshall (strator regis, cyninges horsþegn), in the year 897, Egwulf, a cupbearer (pincerna, byrel ? compare Beowulf, 2316, Cod. Exon, 161–8), in the year 892, Sigewulf ; † all three filled the highest posts in Alfred's court, as is learnt from

\* S. Kemble, "The Saxons in England," II. p. 128, with the quotations from Florent. ; "Cod. Dipl.," N. 1065.

† "Cod. Dipl." N. 320.



the history of Alfred's maternal grandfather. There was a royal earl named Lucumon. The royal Thanes were a kind of subordinate officers under the Ealdormen, as Eadulf of Sussex. The King's companion was called Athelferlð.\* A certain Beornwulf was burgrave at Winchester. Wulfric, who was Marshall before Egwulf, and died in 897, filled at the same time a post as Wealhgerefa, Earl of the Welsh; which office, very probably, consisted in the superintendence and judicature of the unfranchised Britons who might be in Alfred's service, or upon his estates in the western part of the kingdom.† However scanty these records may be, they nevertheless help to increase our knowledge of Alfred's life as a king.

But his labours as such were of a far more extensive and lasting importance in his character as legislator, in which he strove to communicate to his people a moral training; and in which, upon the ground-work of old institutions, he had created decidedly new ones. For this investigation his well preserved collection of laws affords the most certain and richest materials.

At a very early period the statement was put forward, that Alfred had been in the truest sense of the word, strictly the Lawgiver of his people: we find it stated, that in the midst of the noise of arms and the clash of warlike instruments, he found time to

\* "Cynges geneat," "Chron. Sax.," A. 897.

† "Chron. Sax.," A. 897, with which compare Kemble's "Saxons," II., pp. 178, 179.

complete so great a work.\* We know, however, in the first place, that during his reign a prosperous peace prevailed in England for several years; and we may safely venture to assume, that the execution of his collection of laws must also have taken place during the period in which so many other things were done. Further, the designation Lawgiver, strictly understood, is erroneous—he introduced no new code of law, his labours consisted purely in re-establishing, renewing, and improving. Alfred found everywhere in his kingdom existing laws of which he could avail himself as a groundwork; but after the war of liberation, the organization of new conditions, as well as the closer connection of the different constituent parts of the monarchy, and the elevation of the royal power, required a revision and sifting of all the old laws: it had become necessary to make preparations for a general system of legislation.

The old law of usage had already gained a permanent form through being written for some centuries among the individual races, subsequent to their conversion to Christianity: at the same time a complete written language was developed much sooner in the Anglo-Saxon dialect than in any other Teutonic language: and the same reasons which, very fortunately for the British island, assigned more definite limits to the ecclesiastical power than was the case on the Continent, also retained the Teutonic

\* “*Ille inter fremitus armorum et stridores lituorum leges tulit,*” is found in a manuscript of William of Malmsbury, comp. Hardy, II. § 122.

language as that of the law : so that it was not until the invasion of the Romanized Normans that the English people were governed by decrees whose language they did not understand. But in the old time, Kent, Wessex, and Mercia had their own law in their own dialects ; as the latter were everywhere very closely related, so were also the former, for indeed all the races were Teutonic. When Alfred commenced the work in which he was faithfully assisted, both in word and deed, by the wise and the great of his country, he had before him the Kentish collection of the first Christian King, Athelberht, and the supplements of his successors, Hlothære, Eadric, and Wihtred ; his own ancestor, too, Ine, had caused the West-Saxon laws to be inscribed ; and in Mercia the code of the great Offa was adopted. Upon reviewing them, he found, in all three, much which met with his full approval ; with some things, however, he was not satisfied, and they were, therefore, expunged with the consent of his councillors. Nevertheless, he sometimes hesitated in replacing them by laws of his own because he could not tell whether they would be considered good by his successors.\* Ine's collection alone was completely included in the code, and was, moreover, especially adapted to the condition of the original country of the West-Saxons. Some portions were also derived from the Kentish and Mercian law ; but it has not been possible to carry the investiga-

\* "Forþan me wæs uncuð hwæt þæs þam lician wolde þe æfter us wæren." Introduction to Alfred's laws, by Thorpe,—*"Ancient Laws and Institutes of England,"* I. p. 58.

tion of this point sufficiently far, as Offa's book is lost.

Thus were the component parts of the individual systems of law likewise transferred into the more comprehensive work, and the principal part of the old Teutonic public and private law thereby received a more extended importance and acceptance. In a history of the King's life it is, however, superfluous to enter upon a close examination of the peculiarities of the Anglo-Saxon law, especially as the subject has been treated with success by much more experienced scholars, and in works which are universally accessible. But the necessity of gaining a more accurate comprehension of the mode of thought and actions of the King, requires a statement of those points in which his modifying hand is to be recognised. His motives in these reformatory proceedings were of two kinds, the changed and increased range of action of the royal power, and the strong desire felt by his own heart, of infusing Christian convictions into the popular laws which had come down from paganism, and of making them their principal support. As soon as such traces are met with in his code, the spirit of Alfred is clearly observable, either itself creating or acting at least the part of pioneer to posterity.

The laws of King Ine present a forcible picture of the insecurity and rude licentiousness which prevailed at his time in Wessex. The social relations which the people had brought with them at their immigration, received fresh force on the

occasion of the division of land ; the blood-money of all free men was little calculated to obviate the constant breach of peace and the never ending feuds. Moreover, the daily increasing landed possessions of the church, which at once entered upon the civil right of the heathen priesthood, as well as the relation of the conquerors to the subjugated aborigines, who had mostly become serfs, kept the public judicial affairs in a continual state of fermentation. The greatest number of punishments in Ine's book are, therefore, directed against breach of the peace, feuds, murder, theft, and injuries to woods and cattle ; or the work treats of conditions of exemption from duty on removing from one place to another, and the hitherto almost unrecognized position of the unfranchised, and especially the great numbers of Welsh subjects in the western parts of the kingdom. Alfred transferred much of this into his code : in some things he hit upon judicious modifications. Formerly, different punishments were inflicted for theft of gold, horses, and bees. For the future all these offences were to be treated with equal rigour ; a greater punishment was imposed only upon kidnappers of men. In other respects, especially in penalties for bodily injuries, the book was, according to the precedent of the Kentish law, much more detailed and accurate than that of his predecessor.\* He also endeavoured to maintain the old fundamental principle that land leased or granted by royal charter (*bôc-land*), should not go out of the family and away

\* Compare "Leg. Ælf," 44-77, with "Leg. Æthelb. 32-73.

from the male heirs, in all the force which it appears to have possessed in the Mercian law.\*

A peculiar circumstance, and the penetration of elements which were decidedly foreign to the old Teutonic national law, now make their appearance in many places. Even the first article of the collection of laws contains a surprising new ordinance : whoever acts contrary to his oath or pledge, shall be sentenced to forty days' imprisonment in a royal place, and submit to the penance imposed by the bishop. The use of the word "carcer" indicates, that the deprivation of personal liberty, for a longer or shorter term, could not have been previously known to the Saxons, and, in fact, nothing similar is found in the earlier collections of laws. But the administration of justice now began to be exercised from above with a more powerful hand, and, especially in this case, the maintenance of the sanctity of an oath, which had essentially changed in its Christian importance, was enforced with all strictness. The fourth article is still more important : whoever conspires against the life of the king, or his lord, either personally or through others, shall answer for it with his life, and the whole of his property; if he desire to absolve himself from the accusation, in a legal manner, this is to be done only according to the blood-money fixed by royal authority. Here is a clear proof of the increased power to which monarchy had risen, and of the means by which it was proposed

\* See on this subject, Kemble, "Cod. Diplom.," Introd. p. xxxii., with reference to "Leg. Ælf.," 41.

to maintain its authority, and to exhibit it to the world as inviolable. The blood-money of the king, which, it is true, placed him, to some extent, upon an equal footing with all other free men, certainly remained; whoever was in a position to avail himself of this as an expiation of his offences, could escape the penalty of death. But the new principle, and the only one which obtained in subsequent times, began already to develop itself, and its introduction must be ascribed to Alfred, according to whose Biblical conception punishment and retribution proceeded immediately from God, and who believed that this law was intended to protect earthly princes by divine right.

It does not appear altogether just to charge Alfred with despotic intentions, upon the ground of these innovations, and to reproach him with entertaining un-Teutonic sentiments, hostile to the people.\* The Jewish doctrines, which restricted the liberty of conscience and of civil freedom, and which had at that time long governed the whole Catholic Church, began also to penetrate into the institutions of the state; after great kingdoms had everywhere grown up from among the descendants of the conquering Teutons, all rulers relied, in the

\* Kemble, "Saxons," II. p. 208, n. 2. The gifted author, actuated by his Germanic tendencies, ascribes these errors to Alfred's exaggerated predilection for foreign literature, and alludes to his violent character in his earlier years. The latter is altogether unproved (p. 130), and the time of the literary labours, and the issue of the code of laws is not fixed to within about a twelve-month. The whole attack bears too much the colouring of our own century.



totally altered social position of their people, upon the advice which was given to them by their clergy, who were influenced by Romish ideas. It was a part of the spirit and tendency of this portion of Middle Age history, that no Christian country and no Christian prince should make an exception to this rule; and it was not even possible for our Alfred, in the great and successful attempt to unite and advance his people, which was attended with such important results, to avail himself of other means than those which at that time were universally prevalent. Experience had moreover clearly shown him what would be the fate of the national prosperity, if he now, at the favourable moment, left all in the state that it was before. And had not his grandfather, Egberht, already endeavoured to learn from Charlemagne the conception of a modern state? He therefore commenced his reformation from the top: whatever, in the outermost members of the social system, each of which was formerly full of vigour, had now died away, was abolished. He allowed all the other sources of activity of his kingdom to remain in full force, and it is to his protecting hand that we must ascribe the existence of many of them in England at the present day, while most other German states of Europe have long and painfully experienced their loss. A powerful monarchy was the sole condition under which the country could be saved at that period; the article also, to which these remarks refer, had this object in view, and not even an Alfred could make a selection of the means to be employed.



There were also good grounds, in the past history of the West-Saxon state, for the elevated position of the royal person. How early did this comprise a great number of Hundreds, and extend over several Gaus, while the Jutish and Anglian kingdoms appear to have consisted only of one, or of few; we know that Mercia and Wessex continued their conquest for centuries after their foundation. Finally, in the storm of events, Wessex alone remained; all the remaining kingdoms had fallen, whilst several relapsed to their original position of Gaus, under the supreme dominion of Wessex. It is not, therefore, to be wondered at, that the King of Wessex far exceeded in power and dignity the ealdormen who governed his Gaus. Alfred even began to transform them into officers of his own, and the hereditary possession of their office, if we except that of those in Mercia, was abolished during his reign. Ealdorman and bishop, the two highest dignitaries in state and church, were gradually placed upon a footing of equality, while formerly it was the king who was esteemed of equal dignity with the bishops, so that it may easily be perceived how the king originally rose from among the number of and above the other ealdormen. While in the code of Ine the same penalties were imposed upon the king \* and the bishops, for breach of the peace — among the people of Kent theft committed against the church, bishops, or priests being even punished more strictly than when committed upon

\* J. Allen, "Inquiry into the Rise and Growth of the Royal Prerogative in England," p. 37, ed. II.

the property of the king — Alfred enjoyed, in this respect also, a much higher consideration than any other spiritual or temporal ruler of the state. Fines for offences against the king remained the same, while those for offences against the bishop and ealdormen, as well as against the lower class of nobles and commonalty were lowered, in proportion to their positions.\* But even Ine had decreed that whoever ventured to draw his sword in the king's house, and to disturb the peace, should expiate such an offence only according to the sentence of the king's letter, with death, or by a severe punishment; so that Alfred transferred this law into his code unaltered.† In these, and similar criminal regulations, is to be recognized the state of the right of the person, as it was originally established upon the social positions of the people, but now in a state of new development; the importance of the old blood-money began to decrease, and even corporal punishments began to supply its place. Nevertheless all classes of the population continued to retain their position as previously; there were also a number of serfs beyond the pale of the law, but it is a gratifying circumstance that in Alfred's law they are scarcely once mentioned, while the

\* "Leg. Inæ, 45 : " King and bishop, 120 shillings; ealdorman, 80 ; a thane, 60 ; a gesithcundman, 35 : on the contrary, " Leg. Ælf.," 40 : King, 120 ; archbishop, 90 ; bishop and ealdorman, 60 ; twelfhyndeman, 30 ; sixhyndeman, 15 ; ceorl (Frank), 5 ; compare Kemble, " Saxons," II., p. 399.

† Except that instead of "house," he inserted "hall." Compare "Leg. Inæ," 6, with "Leg. Ælf.," 7.

decrees of Ine, referring to the Celtic slaves, constituted a prominent peculiarity of his code. The continuance of the corporate security (*freoburh*, *friðgegyld*,) of free families was confirmed by several articles: whoever was not included in this combination, fell, either as an outlawed criminal or as a foreigner, without any protection into the power of judicial authorities, or, like the travelling merchants, enjoyed the protection of the king and his magistrates, in return for certain duties which he had to fulfil.\* The necessity of forming corporations of a new character might have already made itself felt at that time, but their origin and development did not take place until the rise of the towns.

To the encroachments of the ecclesiastical power, though accompanied at the same time by an increase of Christian feeling, is to be ascribed a long series of regulations, which Alfred had included in the first part of his collection. It is certainly creditable and excellent that he should have contemplated educating the manners of his powerful, but still very unpolished people, according to the doctrine of the sacred writings. He had to prevent not only theft and feuds, but also debauchery and adultery among all classes; the seduction of nuns was punished with special severity. Ine had already commenced the work; the measures, however, of his great successor respecting such offences are much more numerous and stringent. The penalties which were imposed by both for working upon

\* "*Leg. Ælf.*," 42, 27, 34. Compare Lappenberg's translation, II., p. 333.

Sundays and fast days, stand in the same relation.\* The regulations referring to the priests, the revenues which land yielded to the Church, and to the sanctuary of the Church, had already been briefly treated of in the code of laws of the eighth century. However, King Ine, in constructing them, had not only consulted the whole of his Witan, but also his two bishops, Hedde and Eorcenbald.† Alfred's high respect for the church and its faith enabled him to frame far more comprehensive regulations. Although the amount of the fines imposed for offences against the highest ecclesiastical dignitaries were far below those where he was concerned, still any breach of the dignity of their persons was severely punished. Whoever took the liberty of fighting in the presence of the archbishop or the bishops, was fined 150s. and 100s. And if priests so far forgot themselves as to kill a man in conflict, they were to be delivered over to the bishops, who deprived them of their possessions, and stripped them of their ecclesiastical robes. With regard to the sanctuary in churches and monasteries, to which fugitives and offenders took refuge, it was determined with great precision how long such persons were to be sheltered there, and how they were to be treated during that time. Theft of church property was punished by a double fine, and with the loss of the hand.‡

\* "Leg. Inæ," 27, 31, 3; "Leg. Ælf.," 8, 9, 10, 11, 18, 25, 26, 43.

† "Leg. Inæ," 1, 4, 5, 61, and the Introduction to them, by Thorpe. I., p. 102.

‡ "Leg. Ælf.," 15, 21, 2, 5, 6.

It is sufficiently evident from these particulars, what transformation the national law was undergoing, and what were the principles upon which it was conducted. But Alfred impressed upon the whole code, by a peculiar addition, the character much rather of his own mind than that of his age. For instance, he commences his new code of laws with extracts from the sacred writings themselves, both the Old and New Testaments.\* It begins: "And the Lord spake these words; I am the Lord thy God," &c.; then follow the Ten Commandments, omitting the second, in such a manner however that the 23rd verse of the chapter is introduced in the place of the tenth commandment. Immediately afterwards come, with some trifling omissions, the 21st and 22nd, and the first half of the 23rd chapter of Exodus, which comprise the Mosaic laws respecting the relation of the master to his servants, the punishment of murder, manslaughter, theft and other gross sins, as well as the observance of fasts and festivals. The last sentence is: "Swear not by the heathen gods, and call not upon them for any reason" (Exod. xxiii. 13). Then further on we find: "These are the commandments which the Almighty God himself delivered to Moses, and charged him that he should keep, and then the only begotten Son of God, that is, Christ our Saviour came upon earth and said that he was not come to break these laws, or to abolish them, but to fulfil them in all respects; and he taught mercy and humility.

\* "Laws and Institutes," I., pp. 44, et seq.

After he had suffered, but before his disciples had gone out into all lands to teach, and while they were still together, they converted many heathens to God. Now as they were all assembled together they sent disciples to Antioch and Syria to preach the doctrine of Christ. But when they learned that they did not prosper they sent them a letter, and this is the letter which all the Apostles sent to Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, which have now been converted from heathendom." Here follows, word for word, that letter from the Acts of the Apostles, xv. 23—29. Alfred adds again from Matthew, vii. 12: "All things whatsoever ye would not that men should do to you, do ye not either so to them. According to this one commandment man shall remember that he shall judge every one rightly, and then he requires no other law." This brief history of the laws of God on earth then proceeds: "Since it now came to pass that many nations accepted the faith of Christ, many synods of holy bishops as well as other distinguished Witan, were assembled at various places, and also among the English people after they had accepted the Christian faith. From mercy, which Christ taught in the case of most misdeeds, they decreed that, by their permission, temporal lords might receive fines for almost every misdeed, on the first time of commission, except such offences against the Lord himself, towards which they could not venture to show any clemency, because God the Almighty did not pardon those who set themselves up above him, nor did Christ, God's son, forgive him by whom he was sold

to death: and his command was, to love a master as the Lord himself.\* They therefore established, in many synods, fines, for numerous human sins, and wrote in many synodic books, here one law there another. Therefore I, King Alfred, have caused the laws to be collected and written, which our forefathers observed, those which appeared to me to be good," &c. The course which he observed in this has been mentioned above. "I, Alfred, King of the West-Saxons showed them to all my Witan, and they said they were all willing that they should be observed." Here follow his own laws.

So strong an infusion of Biblical principles, indeed, is scarcely to be met with in any other collection of laws belonging to the Middle Ages, nor do we know that the principal features of Mosaic legislation were anywhere so perfectly adopted. Numerous passages from both Testaments are certainly to be found in the Frankish law, and in other systems which obtained upon the Continent, and the influence of the powerful princes of the church, and of the whole ecclesiastical body upon legislation, is everywhere unmistakable; but nowhere do we find that the idea of combining the old Teutonic with the Judaic Christian law into a uniform whole has been carried into such perfect practical application. How naturally the conjecture arises that Alfred humbly submitted to the control of his bishops, and allowed them to manage state affairs, as was the case in the countries of the feeble Carlovings, and had

\* "Lufian swa hine selfne," not as "one's self," as Thorpe translates, but "like himself," viz., God. Kemble, "Saxons," II. p. 208.



been so even during the life of his own father, from whom the son derived his reverence for God and the Church. However, a closer examination of the then existing position of the church in England, and the influence of its administrators, will result in demonstrating to us that this was not the case, but much rather that Alfred reigned in the most admirable harmony with his ecclesiastics, and that they were less the heads of the church than the King himself. Certainly that despotic tendency which under his guidance was introduced into the public administration cannot with any justice be denied, as there are sufficient individual traits in which it is visible; still in spite of this we must speak of Alfred with all possible veneration, since he endeavoured to conduct justice and law upon the eternal divine precepts, and gave the highest prominence to the Christian principle of neighbourly love as the fulfilment of the Mosaic dispensation. It was from his own earnest conviction that this peculiarity in the drawing up of his code of laws proceeded; and it is on that account also that we fain would ascribe to the first part such an important moral significance. The question may, indeed, be raised as to whether Alfred really intended to have governed his subjects according to the letter of the Levitical laws. To what purpose are such penalties as those against the injury of vineyards? Is it not ridiculous to remind the Saxons of the slavery of the Israelites in Egypt? Although many of the fundamental regulations with regard to property in land and cattle, personal injury and murder, were precisely the same



among the German as among the Semitic races, although from the Hebrew serf, who, after six years' servitude acquires his freedom, Alfred makes a Christian,\* still, upon the whole, it was only his intention to present to his people a picture with which they ought to be acquainted, and which would enable them to perceive in what respects they were still deficient in their Christian community. He contemplated bringing them over to his own conception that justice and retribution belonged to God, who appointed the king as his representative upon earth for the exercise of justice. Still it is sufficiently surprising when we reflect upon the primitive German institution of blood-money as an indemnification against the Divine wrath.

It now remains to add some remarks upon the administration of justice. That Alfred strictly adhered to the opinion that every one should in justice and equity be treated according to the doctrine of Christ is still further proved by an historical testimony. It may be inferred, from an undoubtedly genuine fragment of Asser, that among the numerous evil consequences of the Danish invasions a degeneracy had gained ground in the management of the judicial authority.† Throughout the whole kingdom the commonalty and lower classes

\* The decree of Moses, that if a servant desired to remain a slave, his master should bore his ear at the door of the temple with an awl,—“Laws and Institut.,” I., 47, n. 11,—sounds very much like the German customs. Compare Grimm. “Deutsche Rechtsalterthümer,” p. 339.

† Asser, towards the end. “Florent. Wigorn.” I. p. 106.

of freemen found protection from scarcely any one but the King himself, for the great and noble who had to render justice were overbearing in their pride, and their minds were more directed to temporal affairs than to those by which they might have done honour to their names as Christians. At the regular assemblies, where the earls and other officers held their courts, there were so many disputes and contentions as to the interpretation of the law, that it was seldom that any one was satisfied with the judgment which was passed. But the King caused all judgments, just and unjust, to be laid before him, and he submitted them to the strictest examination, especially if the injured person had himself appealed to him. The insecure state of things in this century was in itself a cause that the King should from day to day be still more looked up to as the supreme protector of the judicial authority. But the confidence which a large number of Alfred's subjects placed in him was fully justified by his great conscientiousness. He was more sincere than any one else in the whole country in his endeavours to pronounce true and equitable decisions,\* and to confer justice upon the poor and oppressed, as well as the rich and powerful. Therefore he examined every decision which was taken in any one of his district courts as to whether it was just or not. He frequently summoned the judges to his presence and examined them himself; and he often caused reports on such matters to be made him by some faithful officer of

\* "In exequendis judiciis discretissimus indagator."

his household. His principal object was to discover whether an injustice had been committed from ignorance or evil intention, from attachment or fear and hatred, or even from mercenary motives. It sometimes happened that the judges admitted their ignorance, but Alfred then earnestly represented to them their folly, and said: "I wonder at your great rashness that you who have been appointed by God and myself to the office and dignity of wise men\* should have entirely neglected the endeavours and actions of the wise. Therefore either resign your temporal power or exercise yourselves, as I desire, the more zealously in the study of wisdom." In this manner many earls and high officers frequently went away and endeavoured in their old age to retrieve what they had neglected† in their youth, competing with the boys in school, as they more willingly submitted to a course of instruction to which they were unaccustomed and which had to commence with rudimentary studies than give up their position.

There are no grounds for doubting the truth of this narration: the fact is distinctly recorded as having repeatedly occurred. It was early known and is supported, if any fact ever was so, on the living testimony of contemporaries.

It certainly happened that in the course of centuries the desire of exaggeration and embellishment exercised a prejudicial influence in this particular as

\* "Sapientes," "witan."

† "Illiterati ab infantiâ comites pene omnes, præpositi ac ministri."

well, and according to the statements of the thirteenth and following centuries the Saxon king was merciless enough to have a large number of unjust judges hanged after a severe reprimand.\* But how utterly were the best traits of Alfred's character mistaken and actually overlooked! For precisely the same endeavour which gave to his code of laws their peculiar stamp, namely, his endeavour to elevate his people in moral greatness, and to make them acquainted with the Christian faith, is also again perceptible in the genuine remains of Asser. Christianity requires that equal justice should be dealt out to the high as well as the low. The state in which this principle is to be carried out seeks for wise and experienced judges. It must, indeed, have been a sad reflection for Alfred that precisely those who in position and wealth should have been brilliant examples to all other people, and who had so important a voice in the public administration of justice, should have been found wanting in this particular. It was well known that they could not even read the laws of their native country: the formerly universal law of usage began to lapse into oblivion. And in connection with this fact is another point of no less significance to us.

In addition to earls and officers, Asser speaks of regular judges,† who, although it would appear from their title that legislation was the business of their life, were, however, not in a position to

\* Andrew Horne, "Miroir des Justices," pp. 296-298.

† He distinguishes between, "comites," "præpositi," and "judices."

exercise it. It is highly probable that the nobles and the free landowners had, during the days of devastation, so alienated themselves from the Commonwealth that they could no longer administer justice without the assistance of persons acquainted with law; a class of jurists thus arose which, perhaps, had already been long growing up, and which the King was desirous of seeing properly prepared and educated for its important duties. It is possible that upon English soil a similar arrangement was in existence as that of the *missi dominici* of Charlemagne. These everywhere managed the business in courts of justice, while the people and its jury still retained the power of deciding; but the King, who possessed only an executive authority, commenced exercising a stricter superintendence through the aid of these emissaries.\* But at any rate, the judges, who were unquestionably popularly called "gerefas" (earls), were answerable for the interpretation of the law, and passed the sentence; and this responsibility exposed them to the reprimand of their superior judge, the King, in cases where they evinced incapacity.†

Before leaving this important subject, and concluding our observations on the then existing political system it does not appear to be irregular to glance at that country which was connected with the government of Wessex by more than one tie. We allude to the Christian-Danish kingdom,

\* See Kemble, "Saxons," II. pp. 41-45.

† Von Sybel, "Entstehung des Deutschen Königthums," p. 235.

whose formation on the eastern coast had been forwarded by the wise policy of Alfred. The primary judicial foundations of this kingdom, namely, those brief statutes, which were drawn up and agreed to in the treaty of Wedmor between both kings and their followers have already been alluded to in their proper place. The brevity of the few principal points bears in itself the stamp of the immediate necessity of the moment.

In spite of his still great attachment to the seamonarchy, Guthorm-Athelstan could not avoid agreeing to these points, and the blending of his own followers with the population of Anglian settlers was already prepared for when he died in the year 890. Although his death occasioned another violent attack of the Danes, and his immediate successor, Eohric, did not prove a model of fidelity, the work once began was founded upon a solid ground-work, and proceeded even amid the storms of a whole year of war. An extension of the stipulations of Wedmor belonging to a subsequent epoch is extant, under the name of the peace between Guthorm and Eadweard. Since it is in the highest degree improbable, and not to be supported by any evidence, that the latter, Alfred's son, was already invested with regal honours and princely power in 890, the new record must evidently belong to the time of his own reign, although only an obscure report has come down to us \* of a Guthorm II., who succeeded Eohric in the year 905. Nevertheless,

\* Thorpe, "Ancient Laws and Institutes," I. p. 166, bases his arguments upon Wallingford, pp. 539, 540.

these laws also belong to the legislature of Alfred, for it is expressly said in the introduction that they were the decrees of Alfred and Guthorm, which had been repeatedly confirmed between the Angles and Danes, and were now renewed by King Eadweard. They are drawn up with the same copiousness which we have remarked as characterizing Alfred's collection of laws, and it is sufficiently evident from them that in the course of twenty years Christianity had become the religion of the state or rather that the old creed which had struck root in the country, had overcome the Paganism of the conquerors. Here, also, the first articles treat of the church and the obedience to Christian commandments. But one God is to be respected who exercises vengeance and retribution. The peace of the church and of the king are equally inviolable, both the king and the church receive their revenues, both watch over the violations of discipline and morals. Labour, swearing, and impiety, on fast days were strictly punished. The regulations against the desecration of the latter appear to have been particularly necessary on account of the recent trespasses of the Northmen. In a similar manner the performance of Pagan religious services, and the crimes of witchcraft and exorcism, were punished. At the same time, however, ecclesiastics and foreigners were to enjoy personal protection as among the West-Saxons, and the law of the different classes of the free population was to be placed upon a footing in proportion to their property. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that, nominally at least, there was a



careful distinction maintained between the amount of the fines imposed upon people of Danish and those of Saxon descent.\*

Thus, at last, the Christian state of England, after having long appeared to be on the brink of destruction, was not only saved by the sword, but its preserver had also of himself re-established order within, and granted it his protection. Whenever in the course of history the peaceful development of a people is interrupted by violent revolutionary events, old institutions which have become powerless are always swept away; if the people withstand the danger, especially under the guidance of a great man, then, upon the restoration of a systematic government, the seeds are sown which ripen into a happy future. Alfred's influence in the administration and exercise of justice must be admitted to present a brilliant example of this phenomenon. When in later ages his people sighed under the harsh oppression of Norman kings, when the powerful alone monopolized justice, when swarms of outlaws took shelter in the woods, and emperiled the roads of the country, the nation looked back with sadness to the security once afforded to them by the just government of Alfred; and, to alleviate their misfortunes, poetically embellished the past time as a golden age, during which travellers might lose a purse full of gold upon the highway, and find it again untouched in a month's time, and

\* The "lah-slitte" of the northern nations (lagsligt in old Swedish law), is always placed by the side of the "wer" and "wite" of the Saxons,—*Laws and Institutes*, I. p. 168.



when golden bracelets were hung upon the cross-roads, and no wayfarer dared to remove them.\*

But the church also, the supporter of the Christian faith, was not less depressed and unsettled than we perceive the temporal affairs of the country to have been at the conclusion of its great struggle. How could it have been otherwise after the rude onslaught of paganism upon the Christian state? Wealth in gold and silver had already been accumulated in the cathedrals and monasteries of the island since the times of St. Augustine and Wilfred. Eager for plunder, the northern marauders rushed with sword and torch upon every sanctified place; the few inhabitants, unused to arms, who had remained to guard their precious treasures, died like martyrs. As soon as the Danes had gained possession of the spoil, they proceeded to the next sacred building, leaving behind them only naked walls blackened by smoke, in which, also, many other treasures, which they were unable to appreciate—books, upon which rested the maintenance of civilization—had become a prey to the flames. The monks of St. Cuthbert were not the only ones who wandered shelterless about the country with the bones of their patron saint and a few church utensils. Every religious foundation suffered from this universal calamity, and the whole church of

\* Ingulph, p. 870; "Will. Malmsb." lib. II. § 122. We here perceive traces of an old Saga that already in Bede, II. p. 16, celebrates the happy reign of Edwin of Northumbria, and later, that also of Frothi the Dane, and of Rollo the Norman. Compare Lappenberg, p. 335.

the Anglo-Saxons had not a refuge left;—happy were those of its members who escaped beyond the sea, and were able to enjoy more sunny days in foreign countries!

But as, in the temporal state, many things were already in a state of decay before the invasion of the Danes, so likewise in the church, there had been for a long time defects which are considered to have contributed to its downfall. Attention has already been directed to the fact, that in the ninth century not one great ecclesiastic arose, and that after the decease of the disciples of Bede, the investigation of the sacred writings, and the cultivation of all accessory studies, had continued to decrease. When the work of conversion was completed at home, the best energies of York and Canterbury were directed to the Franks, and were zealously engaged in their service, preaching the doctrine of the cross to their kindred races in Northern Germany. Meanwhile, an apathetic, comfortable mode of life had filled the place of the former enthusiasm for study among the English ecclesiastics. When, after the warlike reigns of Offa and Egberht, the pious Athelwulf began to reign, the power of the church, regarding only its own benefit, obtained such an ascendancy over him as to appear the true ruler of the state. For the first time the church of England, as so often happened in later centuries, sank, under the cover of piety and Catholic orthodoxy, into unseemly worldly corruption and indifference towards everything elevated; while she almost entirely neglected her highest duties,

the training and civilization of the people, and relinquished the weapons with which she should have fought.

Both the disorganization from without and the moral degradation within, worked together to direct Alfred's attention to the true sources of such an unfortunate state of things. What impressions must he not have experienced when in his childhood he saw his father display the greatest magnificence before the head of the Christian world; and when, in his youth, his ardent desire for philosophical knowledge could not be satisfied, because the church of his native country did not possess a single person capable of teaching Latin! In Teutonic England, as everywhere else in those parts of Europe which had adopted the faith of Rome, learning and erudition were the occupation of the ecclesiastical body alone; the free-born laity, generally speaking, remained strangers to such pursuits. Nevertheless, Bede and his colleagues had achieved great things, and even done much for the future; but it seemed as if the bright star had too soon and for ever set. Alfred looking back, therefore, to this age with touching regret, wrote:\* "I have very often thought what wise men there formerly were in England, both priests and laymen, and how happy were those times when the people were ruled by kings who obeyed God and his evangelists, and how they maintained at home their peace, customs, and

\* Alfred's preface to his translation of the "*Regula pastoralis*" of Gregory I., according to MS. Hatton, 20, in "*Bibl. Bodl.*" printed in Parker's and Wise's Asser.

power, and even extended them to other lands—how they prospered in war as well as in wisdom, and how zealous were the priests also in doctrine and knowledge, and all their divine duties; and how men came hither from foreign lands to seek knowledge, which we can now obtain only abroad if we desire it. So utterly was it neglected by the English people, that there were but few on this side of the Humber who understood their prayers in English, or could even explain in English an epistle from the Latin; and I likewise suspect there were not many beyond the Humber. They were so few that I do not actually recollect one south of the Thames when I began to reign.” In the northern part of the country, therefore, there still remained traces of its previous greatness; but it was always most neglected in Wessex, in the country south of the Thames,—where every germ of higher culture and civilization, which might have lain concealed, must, after the ravages of the Danes at the opening of the ninth century, have been threatened with destruction. Indeed for some time there was the greatest danger that the worship of Woden would be replaced in its old neglected sanctuaries.

But Alfred possessed a true perception of this deficiency; the church of his country required renovation—the support which it had lost, and which reposed on a moral and philosophical basis alone, was to be restored, to save it from total degeneration. Of a reformation, according to our present notions, there could at that time be no idea; the time was

still far distant ere any difference of opinion with regard to dogmas existed in the countries of the West. Rome was the mother, and remained the centre of the church; the connection between her and the island was never interrupted, and it was, therefore, in the first place, Alfred's zealous endeavour, to bind his country still closer to Rome, whence all vitality issued, and poured itself forth as blood does from the heart through all parts of the body. The dangers to be feared from the Romish desire of power had, it is true, frequently been apparent in several countries on the Continent; however, they extended far less readily to the remote island where the Roman canon only gradually gained ground against the national element, and the native language of the country maintained itself even in the church service; where the whole body of the clergy, since the first century following the conversion of the country, had consisted only of natives, and where the strict regulations against celibacy could not be carried out. No pope of the ninth century was here guilty of such arbitrary acts as had already been exercised by Rome in other countries; even John VIII. appears, in the midst of his own restless endeavours in Western and Eastern Europe, not to have found either time or inclination for this. It was a beneficial circumstance for the Church of England that the intimate connection between it and Rome was most zealously maintained on the part of the former. Thus the princes of Britain proceeded, in an almost uninterrupted succession, to the See of

Saint Peter ; and the seminary of their countrymen, the Saxon School, continually arose again from the flames, and kept up the old ties. It is greatly to be regretted that no Italian authorities have come down to us which give any precise information as to the influence of this establishment, since they would throw a clear light upon the mutual relations of both powers ; but it cannot be proved from any testimony that we have that the Saxon school was in Alfred's time an instrument used to further popish pretensions.

Alfred's zeal for the faith was not less lively than that of his predecessors, still he did not either, like Ine, desire, when bowed down by the weight of his position, to banish for ever all worldly cares at the miracle-working graves of the saints ; or, like his father Athelwulf, to give himself up to devotion with a disregard for all other things. However, the Pope was considered by him to be the successor of the first of the Apostles, and the relics of the saints were, in his eyes, worthy of honour, and their legends true. As a true Catholic Christian, he could not, for this reason, emancipate himself from these ideas ; moreover, the deep impressions which he had received in Rome itself during his earliest youth, were uneffaced. As soon as he had established peace at home, he entered into permanent relations with the head of Christendom. The particulars which have come down to us relating to this subject, are as follows :

The Pope, Marinus (882—884), had, soon after he ascended the pontifical throne, sent to the King,

among other valuable presents, a piece of the holy cross, and Alfred, therefore, in the year 883,\* commissioned two nobles attached to his court, Sighelm and Athelstan, to convey his and his people's alms to the church of Rome, as a return for this gift. It was, perhaps, these same envoys who conveyed to the Pope the King's earnest intreaties, that for his sake the Saxon school should be freed from all burdens and taxes. It is related that the generous-minded pontiff readily acceded to this request—that for which Athelwulf had formerly been anxious, and which he had enjoined upon his successors as a last will, was conscientiously carried out by his son. But these two men had a still more important commission: Rome was not the extreme point of the earth to which Alfred's interest in Christian affairs reached; he extended them still further. Alfred had once, when the heathens were encamped before London,—it is uncertain whether so soon as the year 872, or not until 880, and perhaps later—made a

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 883 and 885. Asser, p. 484. "Æthelweard," IV. p. 516. Florence, I. p. 99. The Chronicle is the safest authority; with regard to Sighelm, the Chronicle overthrows the "Swithelmus episcopus," who, according to Florence, followed Asser, who died in 883 (see p. 7, *ante*), and Bishop Sighelm, in W. Malms. "De Gest. pontif. Angl." p. 248 (ed. Frankf. 1601). The first name is not found in any of the genuine lists of the bishops of Sherburne and the second not before the fourth place after Asser, "Monumenta Hist. Brit." p. 560, n. d. Sighelm, on the contrary, was a "minister regis" in the year 875, according to the record in the "Cod. Dipl." N. 307. It is probable that both these ambassadors were laymen of high rank.



vow,\* that after their happy defeat and expulsion, he would send a mission with rich presents to the Christians of the remote East, and the churches in India which were named after the Apostles, St. Thomas and St. Bartholomew. If this were not related by the contemporary Saxon annals, there might be an inclination to doubt the whole report, and declare it to be a fable. But as the signs of the might and fame of Charlemagne once reached the Caliph of Bagdad, in regions which to the people of western countries contained only traditions and wonders, in like manner the Christian king of his age, prompted by gratitude for his own preservation, was desirous of sending his brothers in the faith, at the other end of the world, a friendly mission and friendly presents. According to his own deliberate conviction and that of his contemporaries, St. Thomas had himself preached the Gospel among the Indians, and the church founded by him still existed, although surrounded and oppressed by the heathen of all nations: a vague report of the extension of their doctrine had continued to exist among the Christians of western countries from the earliest times,† and our present knowledge proves that the Mahometans, at their first entry into the East, met with several different Christian sects. Suffice it to say, the envoys of Alfred travelled from Rome into that

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 883, and "Henric Huntingd." V. p. 740.

† There is an Anglo-Saxon "Vita Sti Thomæ" in prose, in MS. Cott. Calig. A. XIV. in which the apostle is sent by a heavenly command, like St. Andrew in the poem which treats of him.



remote distance: they returned, and thanks be to God! writes the Chronicle, they were blessed by the fulfilment of the vow. Perfumes and precious stones are said to have been brought home as memorials of this marvellous journey, and were preserved in the churches\* for a long time. This was the first intercourse between England and Hindostan.

In the year 887, Athelhelm, Ealdorman of the Wiltsætas, already mentioned, bore the presents and tribute of his master and the Saxon people to Rome.† In the following year Beocca, likewise an Ealdorman, discharged this office. Athelswith, the widowed sister of Alfred and the last queen of the Mercians, appears to have departed from the court of her brother in Beocca's company, in order to go to Rome and to end her days in the holy city; but the hardships of the long pilgrimage snatched away this royal lady, who had been early bowed down by misfortune: she did not live to see Rome, but died at Padua,‡ in the same year. In the next year no formal mission went to Italy, but only two couriers§ were sent with letters from Alfred. In the year 890, it was Beornhelm, an abbot,|| who again had to deliver the usual sum in the name of his king. From all the records on this point it appears evident

\* Thus W. Malmesb. "De Gest. Pontiff. Angl." 1. c. and "De Reg. Angl." lib. II. § 122. "Matth. Westm." p. 333.

† "Chron. Sax." Asser, Florent.

‡ "Chron. Sax." 888. Æthelweard, IV. p. 517. Flor. I. p. 108.

§ "Twegen hleaperas," "Chron. Sax." A. 889.

|| "Beornhelm abbad," "Chron. Sax." A. 890.

that this payment was annual; but of a tithe, properly speaking, there was as yet no idea—the spontaneous tribute was especially intended to keep open the path for all the advantages which the king and his people might derive from Rome. It appears remarkable, and in other respects very characteristic, that among the envoys sent to the pope only one, the last, is known with certainty to have been a priest: generally the King entrusted this important and valuable mission only to his immediate officers.

As we are here treating of the external relations which Alfred maintained or commenced in affairs of the church and of religion, we may be permitted to mention in this place two accounts which, from their brevity and isolation, unfortunately afford us only an undecisive glance into a remote circle of action, but which precisely on that account, and because they are based upon contemporary authority, are invaluable. Asser reports\* that he read letters and saw presents which the King had received from Abel, the patriarch of Jerusalem. Now it appears by no means improbable that Sig-helm and Athelstan, either on their way to, or return from India, also visited, at Alfred's command, the land of promise and revelation—that they were joyfully received by the patriarch, and were dismissed with letters and presents to their king on their way to the distant island in the ex-

\* P. 492. "Nam etiam de Hierosolyma Abel patriarchæ epistolæ et dona illi directas vidimus et legimus." From him, Simeon Dunelm. "De Gest. Reg. Angl." p. 684.

treme west. This information is of importance for the little known history of the church at Jerusalem, prior to the opening of the crusades, as one of the rare traces of intercourse between the Christian west and the cradle of its faith.

The other record is connected with the neighbouring island, Ireland, which formerly occupied so brilliant a position on the first diffusion of Christianity, but had now disappeared from its history almost still more than Jerusalem; for the Celtic church was not desirous of connecting itself with the doctrine and protecting influence of the mighty chief at Rome, who was daily rising into greater power. At a time when Alfred, in conjunction with excellent colleagues, was already actively advanced in the labour of re-establishing his church, and when the fame of it had already penetrated beyond the sea, three Scots, Dubslane, Macbeth, and Maclinnum, suddenly appeared upon the coast of Cornwall, in the year 891. They had secretly left their native Ireland, for the observance of the faith was in a lamentable state, and Swifnech (Subin),\* the best teacher that the Scots then possessed, was dead; from pious motives they desired to go on a pilgrimage, and cared little whither. Having embarked in a crazy boat, which was more than three-fourths fastened together with bullocks' hides, and furnished with provisions for seven days, they entrusted themselves to a stormy sea, and did not reach land until the seven days had

\* Compare "Annales Cambriæ," and "Brut y Tywysogion," in "Mon. Hist. Brit." pp. 836, 846.

elapsed. As soon as they had left their miserable vessel, they hastened to the King of the West-Saxons, who undoubtedly received these Celtic sufferers with kindness, and when they represented to him their wish to make a pilgrimage to Rome, and even to Jerusalem, he afforded them his protection and support in this undertaking. Only one of them returned home: perhaps he was the bearer of Abel's letter.\*

Although we can, from these unconnected narratives, form only a vague notion of Alfred's intercourse with Rome and the other parts of Christendom, still they must increase our desire to become acquainted with the actual measures by which he again raised the church of his country, so high and in so short a time, from a condition of total decline, so that both it and himself won such a noble position in Europe at that period. But there is an entire absence of any facts which would enable us to settle this point; it is only from a multitude of personalities that the desired knowledge can be, to some extent, deduced.

The history of the entire West-Saxon diocese during this period, is very obscure; still it may be inferred from subsequent circumstances, that the different Sees remained essentially the same, and only increased in extent towards the west, where the Germanization had still to spread. All of them, Saxon as well as Anglian, were subordinate to the

\* According to "Chron. Sax." A. 891, and "Florent. Wig." I. p. 109. Æthelw. alone (IV. p. 517) says anything about the pilgrimage to Rome and the Holy Land, and its issue.

Primate, the Archbishop of Canterbury. But the government of the latter, as chief pastor, had become weak and uncertain ; during the period of the heathen invasions, both the pastor and his flock had only been intent upon the preservation of their property. No great ecclesiastical question affected men's minds, and we never find in our authorities the slightest trace of any council having been held. The whole building threatened to fall from age and the effects of the storm that howled around, unless the assistance of able men was called in to repair it thoroughly. To this object, then, did Alfred principally turn his attention, as soon as he again enjoyed peace and leisure. We have already seen him dwell particularly on that great deficiency which had been attended with such evil results ; and in order effectually to remedy it, all the men whom the king summoned to act as his fellow-labourers, must have been competent for the work. It affords a remarkable confirmation of his own words : that some few sparks of culture and learning still existed to the north of the Thames, that the first persons whom he selected to advise and assist him were four natives of Mercia.

We have already noticed the zeal with which Werefrith of Worcester managed the affairs of his see ; and Alfred appears to have often summoned him to Wessex, in order that he might profit by his counsel and aid in the common cause. Only two years before the King's death, Werefrith was present at a meeting at Celchyth.\* He survived his

\* "Cod. Diplom." N. 1074.

king for a considerable period, and did not die before the middle of Edward's reign, leaving a noble reputation for well tried activity behind him. The second Mercian of importance was Plegmund, whom Alfred raised to the dignity of Primate on the death of Archbishop Athelred, in the year 890.\* According to a later account he is reported, when the Danes made themselves masters of his native country, to have fled before them to a solitary island in Cheshire, where he settled down, quietly devoting himself to labour, until the King of Wessex created him the highest dignity of his church.† This distinguished man was more closely united by similarity of disposition to Alfred than Werefrith — in many things he was actually his master;‡ and the great project of raising the members of the church, and even the people itself, to a superior state of culture, was undoubtedly confided to his direction. He did not enjoy many opportunities of coming forward in his character as a prince of the church during Alfred's lifetime; but, under Eadweard, he once more appears as a worthy successor of the old Archbishops of Canterbury, having consecrated with his own hands seven bishops in one day, and having proceeded to Rome in the service of his office with great solemnity. He did not die before the year 923. §

\* Asser, p. 487.

† "Gervasius Dorobern. Acta Pontif. Cant. ap. Twysden, X Scriptt." 1644.

‡ "Pleimundus, magister Elfredi Regis," W. Malmesb. "De Gestis Pont. Angl." I. p. 200. § "Chron. Sax." A. 923.

Athelstan and Werewulf, who were also natives of Mercia, obeyed the summons to Wessex, where they prosecuted their labours as priests and chaplains, in immediate attendance on the King. Further than this we possess no account of them.\* The only person fitted for his purpose, whom Alfred found in Wessex itself, was Denewulf, that child of Nature, whose acquaintance, if we may trust the tradition, he once made in so strange a manner in the wilds of Somerset. It is, however, historically sure that, on Dunbert's death, in the year 879, Denewulf became Bishop of Winchester; and that he, too, took an active part in the common work, governing his See until the beginning of Edward's reign.† The other bishops, with whose names we are acquainted, are Swithulf of Rochester, Ealheard of Dorchester, Wulfsize of Sherburne, Heahstan of London,‡ and a Bishop Esne, whose see is unknown.§

But the island did not of itself possess sufficient strength to lay the foundation for so great a work as that which Alfred meditated: he himself had said with sorrow that, at that time, learning must be sought for out of his dominions. He accordingly despatched messengers into the country of the Franks, where, in the German and Romance provinces, many a monastery had then distinguished

\* Asser, p. 87.

† "Florent. Wigorn." ed. Thorpe, I. p. 97. "Cod. Diplom." N. 1085, 1087.

‡ "Chron. Sax." A. 897, 898.

§ "Alfr. Testam." ap. Kemble, "Cod. Diplom." N. 314.



itself for studious application, under the guidance of able men : among them he hoped to find masters for the institutions he might afterwards found. In this he was successful with the priest and monk, Grimbald, who was a most excellent chanter, possessed of an intimate knowledge of the ritual, deeply read in Holy Writ, and adorned with every good quality.\* It is highly probable that he was a brother of the Flemish Monastery of St. Omer ; and, by the permission of his superiors, especially of Fulco, Archbishop of Rheims, he willingly complied with the summons to Wessex. We can place far less reliance on the report that Grimbald was already provost of the monastery in question, on the occasion of Alfred's pilgrimage with his father to Rome ; and that having received his noble guests in a very friendly manner and produced a lasting impression by his natural dignity on the mind of the prince, it was but gratifying a wish of long standing when, upon the entreaty of the latter, the abbot and brothers of St. Omer allowed their provost to join Alfred in England.† Besides Grimbald, Alfred obtained the services of a German monk. This monk was a man of acute understanding called John the Old-

\* " Venerabilem videlicet virum, cantatorem optimum, et omni modo ecclesiasticis disciplinis et in divinâ scripturâ eruditissimum et omnibus bonis moribus ornatum." Asser, A. A. O.

† Mabillon, " Acta Sanct. Ord. Bened." sec. iv. II. 511. " W. Malmesb." II. § 122. The writing of Archbishop Fulco to Alfred in a MS. at Winchester, printed in Wise, Asser, p. 123-129, can hardly be looked upon as genuine. The rest is contained in Cotton MS. extracted in the " Monasticon Anglicanum," II. p. 435, new edition.



Saxon, and probably from the monastery of Corvey.\* He and the Fleming were accompanied by a number of clergy, who were to help them in founding new monasteries, and assist in conducting the studies that were to be pursued there. The similarity of names, and, perhaps, a certain expression used by Asser, caused, at a very early period, the Saxon to be confounded with the celebrated John Erigena the father of the Realists, and represented the latter as appearing in the Saxon's place, or, perhaps, both simultaneously at Alfred's court. But we have not sufficient evidence of the presence of the Irish priest, at that time, at the English court, and, besides this, his whole history is intimately connected with the court and persons of Charles the Bald and Archbishop Hincmar.† Grimbald and John were Alfred's mass-priests, and fully occupied in the duties of their office when he completed his translation of Gregory's "Pastoral," since he makes honourable mention of them in the preface which was written after the year 890.

Lastly, Alfred attached to his service the man whose accounts we have, up to this time, followed, whenever they appeared genuine. As Asser is our only authority with regard to himself, and describes,

\* Asser, pp. 487, 493. Mabillon, II. p. 509.

† Asser calls his Johannes, "*acerrimi ingenii virum*," which might easily have caused later writers, such as Ingulph. p. 470, and Malmesb. II. § 122, to think of the dialectician. The account of the attempt on the life of both in Asser and Malmesbury presents many points of resemblance.

with a certain degree of diffuseness, his first meeting with Alfred, it will, perhaps, not be out of place to give the very words in which he has transmitted to us some few pleasing traits of his King's disposition:—"At this time," he writes under the year 884, "I came, at the King's invitation, from the western and extreme Marches of Britain to Wessex. After having journeyed towards him through long tracts of country, I arrived, accompanied by guides of that race, in the district of the South-Saxons, who, in Saxon, are called Suth-seaxe. I there first beheld him, at the royal seat of Dene.\* After I had been kindly received by him, he pressed me very much, in the course of the conversation, to devote myself entirely to his service, and come to him altogether, leaving, for his sake, all that I possessed beyond the Severn. He promised to recompense me richly for it, as he has since done. I answered, however, that I could not consent to his proposition without due reflection, as it did not appear right to me to desert the holy spot where I had been born, educated, and consecrated, for the sake of worldly might and splendour, and that, if I did, it would be by actual compulsion. On this, he said: 'If thou canst not prevail on thyself to do this, give me at least the half of thy services; live six months with me, and the same period in Wales.' But I answered that I could not immediately promise even this without the consent of those connected with me. But as I remarked that he manifested, I knew not why, so

\* There is a West and also an East Dean, near Chichester.

strong a wish for my services, I consented, if I remained in health, to return to him at the expiration of six months, with an answer which should be advantageous to me and mine, and agreeable to him. With this he declared himself contented, and, after I had given him my word to be with him again at the time fixed on, we rode thence on the fourth day, on my way home. But immediately after we had taken leave of him, I was seized at Winchester with a terrible fever, and for more than a whole year fluctuated, day and night, between life and death. When, therefore, at the appointed time, I did not come, as I had promised, he despatched messengers to me, to urge me to undertake the journey, and inquire the reasons of my non-appearance.\* As I was not able to travel, however, I despatched another messenger to explain the matter and announce to him that, as soon as I had recovered from my illness, I would fulfil my promise. So, when my illness was afterwards overcome, all our brethren agreed in the expediency of my promise, for the advantage of our sanctuary, and all its inmates, and I dedicated myself to the service of the King, on the condition, that I was willing to remain with him six months in every year, either six months consecutively, or alternately three in Wales and three in Wessex, so that the agreement

\* [It cannot but be considered as strange that a man who describes himself as so well known, and in whom the King is represented as taking so much interest, should remain for months suffering from grievous illness in the chief city of the West-Saxons, without the knowledge of Alfred.—ED.]

should also be conducive, in every particular, to the advantage of the monastery of St. David's."\*

According to this account, Asser was a native of Wales, who had grown up and been received as a monk at the monastery of St. David's, which was then exposed to great outrages from Prince Hemeid, who had once gone so far as to drive away all the inmates of the monastery, and, among them, the archbishop Novis, who was a relation of Asser. When, therefore, Asser was admitted, on a footing of friendly familiarity, to an intercourse with the mighty Saxon King, it must certainly have been attended with beneficial results to his monastery, and the whole of his native country. "When, therefore," he says, further on, "I afterwards returned to him at the royal seat of Leonaford, I was very honourably received by him, and remained at once eight months at his Court," variously employed and richly rewarded, as we shall soon see.

Such were the men, of whom, in the years immediately following the deliverance of the coun-

\* Asser, p. 487, 488. We can only guess at the meaning of the last sentence; in the original it is perfectly inexplicable, and runs as follows: "*Et illa (conditione?) adjuvaretur per rudimenta Sancti Degni, in omni causâ, tamen pro viribus.*" The name of the monastery, also, is defaced. The account, however, is written in Asser's genuine style. Who would have given himself the trouble, if forging in Asser's name, to add to the phrase "*ad regionem dextralium Saxonum,*" the words "*quæ Saxonice Suthseaxum appellatur?*" Asser, the monk of St. David's, was the only person who could write in this manner. [I confess that I cannot see the force of this argument; it is my impression that such additions are not at all uncommon in Latin writers of the age to which the forgery, if it be one, is to be ascribed.—Ed.]

try, Alfred formed, as it were, a supreme body vested with the direction of every matter connected with the Church and education. They all appear to have acted with the greatest harmony, for and with each other. The archbishop and the two bishops were, as such, occupied, we may suppose, with the affairs of their sees, while the foreign priests had also their peculiar task marked out for them. There was, perhaps, hardly a monastery in Wessex which had outlived the duration of the war. Either the monastic rules were, through the incursions of the Danes, everywhere most remissly observed, or the people could not be induced to exchange the abundance of their earthly riches for the life of want that was to be found in a cloister. In addition to this, it seems that, in earlier times, the Saxons were far less partial to a monastic existence than their Anglian neighbours,\* for, before Alfred's time, we find religious institutions of this description rarely mentioned. But the enthusiastic and untiring King had long been convinced that literary instruction and culture could be properly fostered in such places alone, and he, therefore, exerted himself most zealously in restoring old monasteries and founding new ones. The government of them was to be entrusted to those learned monks whom he had sent for from abroad, while the priests and monks, who accompanied them, were to form the nucleus of the congregations

\* "Quia per multa retroacta annorum curricula monasticæ vitæ desiderium ab illâ totâ gente, nec non et a multis aliis gentibus fînditus desierat." Asser, p. 493.

round which the natives were to be afterwards assembled. These institutions subsequently became so many schools where instruction was imparted in reading and writing, in the mother tongue, and Latin, and, above all things, in the books and doctrines of the Christian religion.

Concerning these different institutions founded by the King and the persons nominated to them, the following particulars have reached us. At Winchester, that was subsequently the capital of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom, the New Monastery (Newminster, Hyde Abbey) was founded, and Grimbald appointed Abbot.\* Alfred did not live to complete this place, which he commenced in a more magnificent style than any of the others. The son was destined to finish, in memory of his father, what the latter had begun; and, in the first years of the following century, we find the place in a very flourishing condition. Out of gratitude towards God, and in memory of his preservation from great dangers, Alfred, in spite of the great difficulties presented by the nature of the little island, which was rendered inaccessible by thicket and morass, caused a monastery to be erected at Athelney, where he and a few faithful followers had formerly thrown up their fortifications when in a state of great distress. John, the Old-Saxon, with a small band of Frankish monks, took up his residence here, determined to dedicate himself, in the midst of these wilds, to the service of

\* "Will. Malmesb." II. § 122; Ingulph. p. 870; "Monastic. Anglic." II. p. 427, et seq.

God and his own improvement, as well as that of others.\*

Even the youths that were instructed in this place, and brought up to be priests and monks, were foreigners. Among the Franks, Asser himself saw a boy of heathen, that is Danish, descent, who afterwards assumed the monk's gown.† The general repugnance of the Saxons to a monastic life, and especially the secluded position of Athelney, prevented this place from ever attaining any degree of prosperity. Perhaps this may also be attributed to the malicious attempt upon the life of the Abbot John, which is so minutely related by Asser, from the testimony of eye-witnesses.‡ A part of the Frankish monks having entered into a conspiracy against their superior, two of them, armed, glided into the church, in order to murder him secretly, when he came at night to perform his solitary devotions. But the vigorous Saxon heard the rustling occasioned by the first motion of the assassins, and, not unskilled in the use of arms, defended himself until his brethren came to his assistance. Although badly wounded, he escaped with his life, while the criminals were subsequently punished in obedience to a just sentence. So scandalous an act was serious enough to do the

\* Will. Malmesb. "Gest. Pontif. Angl." II. p. 255, says of the monks of Athelney, in the twelfth century: "Sunt pauci numero et pauperes, sed qui egestatem suam quietis et solitudinis amore vel magni pendant vel consolentur."

† "Unum paganicæ gentis, juvenem admodum vidimus, non ultimum scilicet eorum." P. 494.

‡ "Ut audivimus de eo a quibusdam referentibus."



good cause great injury; at any rate, the immigration of foreign monks ceased after this.

But Asser, too, the scholar of St. David's, was destined to take an active part in the management of the monasteries and their scholars. On this subject we can again cite his own words. At the expiration of the eight months already mentioned, that is, "after I had often besought him" (the King) "for leave to return, but had never been able to obtain it, and had at last determined to insist on it, he sent for me on Christmas eve,\* and gave me two documents, in which all the possessions of two monasteries, which are called in Saxon Amgresbyri† and Banuwille, were noted down. These two monasteries did he deliver over to me that day, with everything pertaining to them; and, besides this, a costly silk Pallium and as much incense as a man could carry, adding these words: 'he had not given me so little in order not to give me more at a subsequent period.' Thus, he also conveyed to me afterwards, quite unexpectedly, Exeter with the whole parish situated in Wessex and Cornwall. On this, I obtained leave to set out for the two monasteries, which were richly endowed with all kinds of property, and thence to proceed home."‡ We must not, from this, suppose that Asser was thus brilliantly rewarded merely on account of his literary services as the King's teacher; on the contrary, he

\* Probably A. 886.

† One MS. reads Cungresbury, a place not far from Banwell, in Somerset.

‡ Asser, pp. 488, 489.



was destined to take an active part in practising what he taught, and by promoting him to the rank of abbot and subsequently to that of bishop, Alfred won him for ever for himself and his kingdom.

That Asser became a bishop is certain, but we are not so sure as to the exact time or the see to which he was nominated. The following is the state of the case as far as we are enabled to gather from other authorities. In the first place, it is undeniable that the King himself mentions his Bishop Asser,\* in the preface to the Pastoral, and says that it was with his assistance that he completed the translation of the book. Besides this, we have a number of genuine records, from the year 901 to the year 909, signed by Bishop Asser, although, unfortunately, without any mention of his see;† and, finally, in all the manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon annals, we are told that Asser, Bishop of Sherburne, died in the year 910. According to this, the old West-Saxon bishopric must have been given him by his King; but, in other places, we find, as late as the beginning of the tenth century, Bishop Wulfsige, of Sherburne, who may be the bishop not mentioned by name in Alfred's Testament, equally as well as Asser.‡ All we can do is to suppose that it was not until the death of Wulfsige, in the first years of Edward the First's

\* "*Æt Assere minum biscepe.*"

† Kemble, *Cod. Diplom.* N. 335, 337, 1076, 1077, 1082, 1085, 1087.

‡ "*ðam (bisceope) æt Scireburnam;*" the Latin text has, "*Et Assero de Shireburn.*"

reign, that Asser succeeded to the see and settled permanently in Wessex. There is nothing against this supposition in his own account, according to which Alfred gave him Exeter, with a parish—he purposely avoids using the word diocese—in Cornwall and Wessex, consisting partly of large tracts of country, which he as a Briton was most fitted to manage, and partly of Saxon congregations, which had only been formed very recently, and which at the death of Wulfsige, were, with their bishop, transferred to Sherburne.\* The well-known fact of Exeter not having been erected into a bishopric before the time of Edward the Confessor cannot be construed into a reason against our adopting this supposition, as the uncertain political bond existing between the kingdom and its Celtic subjects permitted, as yet, no unity in the management of ecclesiastical affairs, although it certainly did not exclude the possibility of an endeavour being made to establish this unity. Nothing, therefore, prevents our recognising the results of Asser's labours, beyond the circle of the Court, in the management of churches and monastic institutions.

With reference to the latter we have still some few historical remarks to offer. There is no doubt that the female sex felt much more inclined than the male portion of the community, to bid adieu to the world, and take the vows. From a very

\* I perfectly agree, on this point, with the reasons which Lingard, "History and Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church," II. pp. 420–428, ed. II., adduces against Wright, "Biogr. Lit." p. 405, et seq.

early period there had been nunneries in Wessex, like that at Werham on the south coast. Two new ones were now built and existed down to the period of the Reformation when they were finally suppressed. At Shaftsbury, in Dorset, "at the southern gate," Alfred founded, perhaps in the year 887, an establishment for nuns, and, in addition to endowing it, as well as the cloister at Winchester, with rich livings, he created his second daughter Athelgeofu its abbess. Many other noble ladies followed her example and took the vows. The princess, whose general health was bad, and who was, perhaps, even paralytic or lame, had chosen this kind of life in a devout spirit, and been received into holy orders at an early age.\* In like manner, did Alfred's wife, Ealhswith, consecrate for the benefit of her soul, a nunnery at Winchester to the Virgin Mary, with the intention of withdrawing from the world and retiring thither at her husband's death.† A similar degree of zeal was shown in Mercia by Athelred and Athelfled, who founded, at Gloucester, the monastery of St. Peter, to which they made rich donations, and where they enshrined the relics of the holy King Oswald.‡

\* Besides Asser, pp. 485, 495, the foundation-charter, preserved in the "Registrum de Shaftesbury," in Kemble, N. 310, says: "And mine dochte Agelyue . . . for panne hie was on broken ihadod;" "Aþered Areebisceop" signs as witness. Florence and Simeon mention the foundation in the year 887. Compare "Monast. Anglie." II. p. 471, et seq.

† "Monast. Anglie." II. p. 451, from the annals that have been preserved of the foundation.

‡ Will. Malmesb. "De Gest. Pontif." IV. p. 283.

Having thus collected the material and historical facts, we are enabled to take a view of the high moral purpose which always animated Alfred in the selection of all the persons we have named, as well as in all the arrangements he made, and which, in treating this subject, we placed first. He proposed to raise his clergy by education and learning, from the low state to which it had sunk, and to infuse new life, with its attendant advantages, into the whole church. But, besides this, he wished that the remainder of his subjects should, also, have a share in the course of instruction, and that his whole kingdom should make a step in civilisation and morals. Such was the grave field for their labours which he pointed out to men like Asser and Plegmund; and, animated by these ideas, he did not hesitate, as we have seen, to call in foreigners to his assistance. In the churches and monastic schools, the work was now begun, sometimes under the greatest disadvantages. The favourable results, however, were visible even during the next few years, for as early as the reign of Alfred's immediate successors, the West-Saxon clergy exhibited a far greater degree of culture than had ever before been the case.

But nothing, at the present day, excites our satisfaction in a higher degree than the accounts we read of what Alfred, inspired by the same noble enthusiasm, and assisted by the same fellow-labourers, effected for the intellectual improvement of laymen. The King's own words, in his celebrated preface, are the clearest evidence on this head. His

wish is "that the whole body of freeborn youth in his kingdom who possess the means, may be obliged to learn as long as they have to attend to no other business, until they can read English writing perfectly, and then let those who are dedicated to learning and the service of the church, be instructed in Latin." \* These are golden words, such as were rarely pronounced by a great man in the Middle Ages, and not to be met with again until, at a far later period, they were uttered with similar energy by the Reformers of the Church. As the best confirmation and fulfilment of this wish, Asser informs us that the King first carried out his plan in his own house. He caused his children to be instructed in every branch of that education, the want of which he had once so bitterly regretted. His youngest son, Athelward, who especially evinced great aptitude for intellectual occupations, was, in company with almost all the noble and plebeian boys in the whole neighbourhood, committed to the care of experienced teachers. The sons of all the members of the royal household, whom he loved no less than he did his own children, were, by his commands, taught to act in a moral and proper manner, and he himself did not disdain to be sometimes present during their lessons. In

\* "ðæt eall sio gioguð ðe nū is on angelecyne friora monna. ðara ðe ða speda hæbben. ðæt hie ðæni befeolan mægen sien to liornunga oðfæste. ða hwile ðe hie to nanre oðerre note ne mægen. Oð ðone first ðe hie wel cummen englice gewrit arædan. Lære mon siððan furður on læden geðiode. ða ðe mon furðor laran wille and to hieran hade dôn wille."—MS. Hatton, p. 20.

this school\* they zealously learned to read and even write Latin and Saxon, so that, before they had attained the amount of strength necessary for hunting and other manly exercises, which is the great ornament of a nobleman, they were adepts in the liberal arts. Edward, Alfred's eldest son, and Alfhryd, his daughter, were always under the guardianship of their masters and governesses while at court, and were greatly beloved by all persons, both natives and foreigners, on account of their meek friendliness, their gentleness, and the submission towards their father which they had continued to show up to that period (the time at which Asser wrote). They, too, in addition to their other occupations, prosecuted the study of the liberal arts in their leisure hours; they had learnt the Psalms and various Saxon books, especially Saxon poems, and also read much.

In this manner there existed at Court a regular institution, where, in the studious pursuits of teaching and learning, the seeds of many a blessing were sown both for the King's family, and his people. Even those who were destined to govern in future life, and whose attention, according to the custom of the period, was more particularly directed to bodily accomplishments, shared in the course of instruction up to a certain point, and were, especially, taught the poetry of their native country.

\* Asser, p. 485: "Cum omnibus pene totius regionis nobilibus infantibus, et etiam multis ignobilibus, sub diligenti magistrorum curâ traditus est, in qua scholâ," etc.; p. 486: "Et literis imbuere solus die noctuque inter cætera non desinebat."

With touching envy did ignorant old age look down upon more fortunate youth, and those judges and officials, who were so severely censured by Alfred on account of their ignorance, often made their sons or relatives, free-born boys or serfs, who had been to school, read to them when they found it too difficult to learn to do so themselves. In this manner they would have the contents of the books read over and repeated to them, by day and night, while they sighed deeply at the manner in which their own childhood had been neglected, and thought the youth of the present generation fortunate indeed.\*

What a feeling of pure happiness must the great King have experienced at being a witness of this marked progress among his own children, and a great number of those of his subjects! How much superior was the condition of the country, even south of the Thames, to what it was at the mournful epoch when he succeeded to the government!

\* "*Suspirantes nimium intimâ mente dolebant, eo quod in juventute suâ talibus studiis non studuerint, felices arbitantes hujus temporis juvenes,*" etc. Asser, at the end, p. 497.

## SUPPLEMENT TO SECTION V.

NONE but the most uncritical heads, in a far more recent and would-be very learned age, could ever have conceived the unfortunate idea of attributing to Alfred, in addition to the mass of fables that had already been invented concerning him, the superintendence of a university. A visit which Queen Elizabeth paid to the University of Cambridge in the year 1564, furnished an imaginative orator with the opportunity of eulogizing in a high flown Latin speech the greater supposed antiquity of that institution compared to that of Oxford. On this there arose between the two seats of scholastic wisdom in England a dispute that was continued with the greatest obstinacy for several decennaries. On both sides recourse was had to the most absurd proofs in order to bring the foundation of their respective schools as near as possible to the immigration of the Saxons, the development of Christianity among the Britons, or even the Deluge. Thus, an edition of Asser, printed in 1603, from a manuscript that belonged to the celebrated historian Camden, was intended to crush the proofs brought forward by the Cambridge professors. In this book was a detailed account how, in the year 886, a serious quarrel broke out at Oxford between Grim-



bald and the old masters, whom he had found there on his first arrival, and who had refused to give their consent to his foreign arrangements. It then goes on to state that the quarrel lasted three years, until Alfred himself went to Oxford for the purpose of settling the matter. Grimbold's opponents represented to him, and endeavoured to prove from old annals, that their university, although it had certainly lost some of its importance through the troubles that had lately afflicted the country, had shone for centuries, through its old institutions and the influence it had exercised, and that Gildas, Melkin, Nennius, Kentigern, and others, had pursued their pious studies there; they even asserted that St. Germanus had spent half-a-year there. Hereupon Alfred effected a reconciliation, and Grimbold retired indignantly to his monastery at Winchester.\*

Thus much is said in this true Oxford fiction: besides the endeavour to crush their opponents, we can perceive in it that feeling of depreciation for everything not emanating from Oxford itself, which has for ages characterised the place.

But Archbishop Parker, the famous scholar and benefactor of Cambridge, had already printed the first edition of Asser, in the year 1574; and in this edition the suspicious story did not exist. Nor did any other manuscript of the biography, and least of all the oldest, which was then perfect, contain any trace of this story. Whether Camden himself

\* Compare the well-known clause in Asser, p. 489, 490, with Turner, "History of the Anglo-Saxons," Book V. chap. vi. n. 42.

was induced to consent to such a palpable invention, has not been decided; but nothing but the blindest zeal for the most laughable assertions, could ever have induced the men of Oxford to commit this fraud, which long afterwards found belief among themselves, and others equally credulous.

When persons had once taken their documents from the kingdom of fable, it was an easy step to hasten to the assistance of the story advanced, with certain authorities, in which they were deeply read, namely, the legends of the saints. Not only was Grimbold said to have been a professor at Oxford in Alfred's time, but the holy Neot also, the pretended relation and pious forewarner of the oppressed King, is reported to have exercised the greatest influence, by his advice, in bringing about the foundation of schools in Oxford.\*

I had hesitated introducing such a purely mythical personage into an account of Alfred's life, but he deserves, for one reason, to be noticed in this dissertation.

There are several narratives of the life of St. Neot, some in Latin, and one (MS. Cotton, Vespasian D. XIV.) in very good Saxon. The original manuscript must have belonged to the tenth century, as the acts and adventures of Alfred, which are mentioned, had already assumed a traditional character in the mouths of the islanders. The Saint, naturally, plays the principal part; but, as a contemporary and relative of the Great King, then deceased for more than one generation, he drags the latter

\* "J. Bromton, Chronicon, ap. Twysden, X Script." p. 814.

into the same atmosphere of fable with which he is himself enveloped.

“Neotus, qui erat cognatus suus,” is found in a suspicious fragment, which has been transferred from the false annals of Asser into the Biography. Different manuscripts of the legend even make him out to have been a son of Athelwulf, and, consequently, Alfred’s brother.

I will not deny that, during his youth, Alfred may have met with the Saint, who belonged to the south-western part of England, and, without doubt, lived about the middle of the ninth century, and that he then applied to him for advice, and held him in great esteem!\* It is also probable that St. Neot, whose death is set down in the calendar as having occurred upon the 31st of July, died as early as the year 877, since, according to the legend, he is said to have appeared to the King in a vision at Athelney. Nevertheless, according to the authorities quoted, the assertion of an intimate relationship between them, rests upon too weak a foundation; and it is almost incredible that a man who has gained for himself some credit by his works on English history, could go even further than the monks of the tenth and eleventh centuries, and recognise in the Saint the half-brother of Alfred, King Athelstan of Kent, who is lost sight of in the year 851. John Whitaker has, however, attempted to prove this with great obstinacy in his work pub-

\* “Ingulph.” p. 870, says: “Rex Alfredus sanctorum pedibus acclivis et subditus S. Neotum in summâ veneratione habebat.”

lished in 1809.\* In his opinion, the King of Kent, after having courageously carried on the war with the Danes without being able to save the country, renounced the pleasures and sorrows of life, and became a monk. In this character Whitaker assumes that he lived a solitary life, investigating the sacred writings, and zealously exercising himself in pious meditation. Such a conjecture as this, which laid hold of the first persons that happened to be at hand, could not possibly meet with any support; and it was very easy to disprove its arbitrary assumptions by a somewhat more searching comparison of the legend of St. Neot with the sources of general history.† Nevertheless, in the celebrated "Tracts for the Times," by which it is considered that the way has been paved for the last movement towards Rome in Oxford, we find a life of St. Neot, popularly edited by a very able author. In this the transformation of King Athelstan into the Saint is very romantically represented as taking place upon the field of battle, on the sea-shore, among the corpses of the slaughtered Danes. It is a melancholy fact that such newly-invented fables should be industriously circulated for religious ends.

\* The "Life of St. Neot," pp. 69-87.

† This was first done by Turner, "History of the Anglo-Saxons," book v. chap. 5, and in a work, by Gorham, entitled, "The History and Antiquities of Eynesbury and St. Neot's in Huntingdonshire," II. 1820, 1824, in which the Saxon Life is printed, and in which there is a full account of the Saint, and the veneration subsequently paid him. Among other things, Gorham rejects the absurd pretensions of the Oxford Professors, I. pp. 41-43.

Tales that really have a right to be termed fables, sprang up in more innocent times, as if from a poetic soil. As an antithesis of this kind to the preceding, I will here introduce a narrative treating of Alfred, for which I do not know where else to find a place in this work.

John of Tynemouth, a collector of anecdotes of the fourteenth century, who likewise edited a life of the holy Neot, relates the following poetic occurrence:—\*

“One day, while the King was hunting in the woods, he heard the cry of an infant issuing from a tree; he sent his huntsmen to find out whence the voice came: they climbed up the tree and found, in an eagle’s nest at the top, a beautiful child, clothed in purple and with golden bracelets on its arms. The King gave orders that it should be taken out, baptized, and well brought up. In commemoration of this singular discovery, he caused it to be named Nestingus.”† It is added, that the great grand-daughter of this foundling was an object of passionate attachment to King Eadgar.

\* Dugdale, “*Monasticon Anglicanum*,” I. p. 256, ed. I. from the “*Historia Aurea*” of Joh. Tinemuth, MS. in “*Bibl. Bodl.*” lib. 21, cap. 117.

† See various other expressive words in J. Grimm “*Geschichte der Deutschen Sprache*,” p. 24. Expressions like these have given rise to many pleasing stories.

## SECTION VI.

ALFRED AS AN AUTHOR, AND AS THE INSTRUCTOR OF HIS PEOPLE  
IN ALL KINDS OF USEFUL KNOWLEDGE.

IN the previous part of the Work we have attempted to depict the noble zeal with which the King was intent upon elevating the political and social welfare of his people. He not only succeeded, generally, in repressing the universal tendency to degeneration, but, as we also had occasion to remark, he effected, thanks to the most indefatigable activity, many individual improvements in no very great space of time. When such results are observed, we involuntarily desire to investigate the progress of the mental culture of a ruler who, in an age comparatively so rude, cherished such highly moral principles, upon which he sought to establish the happiness of his life. It might, indeed, for other reasons, have been more appropriate to allow the investigation of this subject to precede the description of the re-organization of church and state; it appeared better, however, not to break the chronological thread, but to defer the consideration of Alfred's mental development until that period when he had leisure to devote himself to it; not merely receptively, but also productively. We possess many proofs that Alfred did not give himself up to philo-

sophical occupations until he had provided for the more immediate necessities of his kingdom. The time of his literary activity falls chiefly in the second half of the period, during which there was a cessation of hostilities with the national enemy,

It was, however, necessary, in an early part of the work, to make a passing mention of two circumstances from which, at a later period, his uninterrupted partiality, and his decided capacity for literature, grew forth, viz., his enthusiasm for the national poetry, which he acquired as it were from his mother's breast, and the two journeys to Rome, which he certainly made while very young, but the impression of which upon his susceptible mind was never effaced. He always retained a faint idea of the greatness and splendour of the old world, which did not fail to communicate a very beneficial colouring to the strong feeling of his own nationality. There appears to be recognizable in him already a combination of both elements, like that which, in the ages after the knowledge of antiquity was regained, raised so many great men to the height of fame. His decided partiality, at least, for the history of foreign nations, and the nature of remote countries, as well as the desire to acquire a knowledge of them by investigation, was a rare form of expression for the then existing Teutonic feeling; and the motive for it is only to be discovered in his contact with the places in question, where, under the ruins of many centuries, there still glimmered a few feeble sparks of ancient splendour. It is true that these had



long been disregarded by the age, and classical purity in literature and art, weakened in themselves, had fallen before the attacks of wild and untamed physical force. But still there were remains of past times in the temples and palaces of eternal Rome, or fragments in the favourite authors of the church, which must have filled this right-thinking prince of Teutonic descent with reverential awe, and inspired him with the desire of learning to understand for himself the traces of excellence in the writings of the ancients, and of making his frank-hearted subjects acquainted with them as well. Thus was developed in him the desire of devoting himself to this task, which properly belonged to the Church of Rome, but which that body had unscrupulously or purposely neglected.

On the other hand, there runs throughout his whole life an ardent love for the old ballads of his people—he is himself a German: the opposition of his descent is far stronger than the influence of ancient Rome. The powerful rhythms measured according to the Teutonic art of versification, which the boy had formerly acquired as a permanent gift from his affectionate mother, still resounded in his soul under the most varied vicissitudes of his life. As a youth, who in his riper years passionately followed the chase, he prided himself on the gigantic representations of his traditional ancestors, and the powerful heroes whose deeds the bards sang and told in all countries, from the Danube to the Rhine, from Iceland to the Apennines; as a king he sustained and strengthened his anxious heart, in the



most clouded hours of his reign, by the examples of endurance which this poetry presented to him, and, as a father, he caused his own and his people's children to learn, at an early age, the same poetic treasures in which he himself continually found pleasure and consolation. This is faithfully and repeatedly testified by his biographer.\* It is not difficult, at the present day, to infer from the fragments of Anglo-Saxon poetry, which have come down to us, what traditions were then extant: they belonged, without question, to the great epic cycle, which was the common property of all Teutonic races. This is testified by the epic poem of Beowulf, that hero who was the adversary of monsters of all kinds, and who was connected with the heroic races who also appear in the "Nibelunge Noth," as well as in the ballads of the Edda; this is testified by the ballad of the Wandering Singer, who, at the courts of the Goths, Hermanric, and Theoderic, of the Lombard Audoin, and everywhere that the German tongue was spoken, sang to the heroes, at their banquets, of the deeds of their forefathers, and received, in return, golden presents.† In the small fragment called "the Battle of Finnesburh," we meet Hengist, the mythical warrior. How probable is it, from the genealogies which have come down to us of the West-Saxons, and all the neighbouring kindred races, that what we now possess only in names that we can with difficulty interpret, was once sung by the lips of the wandering

\* Asser, pp. 473, 485, 497.

† W. Grimm, "Deutsche Heldensage," pp. 13-20.

Skopes, and, even in Alfred's time, still lived in verse ! The origin of Christian Anglo-Saxon poetry is, on the contrary, for the most part to be ascribed to the impulse and elevation which Alfred and his age had imparted to the people—it did not begin to unfold itself until after the death of the Great King.\*

In order to gratify the desire for learning nourished in his youth, it required the child-like submission of the man with which, at an advanced age, Alfred again submitted to be a scholar. We know that in his youth his anxious desire for knowledge was not satisfied, and that in the time of war there was no leisure for such an object ; but his powerful mind had never given up the hope of retrieving what was lost, and at the first convenient opportunity the long-formed resolution was carried out with crowning success. Even before he became acquainted with Asser he contemplated deriving the greatest advantages from the wisdom and learning of his bishops : as often as he had time he caused them to read to him, and one of them was obliged to be generally near his person, so that he was already acquainted with many books before he could read himself.† He may have learnt to read his mother-language during his youth, but it was not until he had long reached the age of manhood that he also acquired a knowledge of Latin, and suc-

\* [This is not quite correct; as far as we know, the first Anglo-Saxon Christian or religious poetry was that of Cædman, composed two centuries before the age of Alfred, when the Anglo-Saxon poetry was in its decline.—ED.]

† Asser, p. 487.

ceeded not much better than the great Charles in training his hand, used only to the sword, to the art of writing. As he had no experienced master to superintend his studies, the task of self-tuition, to which he was obliged to have recourse, must have assuredly been a most laborious one; and it is very sure that nothing can have been more difficult for him to learn than the mechanical art of writing; indeed it remains uncertain when he became master of it, and whether the prayer-book, which as a youth he constantly carried about with him in his bosom, and from which, as king, at the time when all appeared lost, he derived consolation, was written by his own hand. But the desire of collecting and preserving, appears to have been innate in him: if he was not himself able to do so, he caused some one else, when he procured the book, to insert\* the horæ, some psalms, and various prayers. When he subsequently selected the faithful Asser as his tutor, the latter found all the pages already filled. The occasion of this was the following:—

Asser commenced his labours with the King, as has already been mentioned, after his recovery at Leonaford, probably in the year 885. He passed eight whole months at the court, and this long period must have been of infinite value to his zealous scholar; for it was at that time that he passed from his elementary studies, with which he doubtless was only imperfectly acquainted, to labours, which, for his time, must be considered as scientific.

\* Asser, p. 474. “*Celebrationes horarum, ac deinde psalmos quosdam et orationes multas.*”

It was his desire to acquire a knowledge of all that was at his command. It is for this reason that his biographer relates his stay at Leonaforð, where he read to the King all the books which could be obtained at the moment, for it had become a second nature with him, by day and night, and under the greatest afflictions both of the mind and body, either to read himself or procure some one else to read for him.\* But the society of the man after his own heart afforded the King an opportunity of discussing what was read; the active-minded prince knew how to derive no little advantage from Asser's lively conversation. "One day, as we were both sitting in the royal chamber," says Asser,† "conversing in the usual manner, it happened that I mentioned to him a passage out of some book. After listening with eager attention and following me with great curiosity, he hastily took out the little book which he was in the habit of carrying with him perpetually, and in which the daily lessons, psalms, and prayers were inscribed, which he had been accustomed to read in his youth, and requested that I would insert the quotation in the book." Asser, joyfully and silently thanking Heaven for the zeal which animated the King, consents immediately, and prepares to write; but every corner of the book is already filled, for Alfred had already noted down many things himself.‡ Asser hesitates,

\* Asser, p. 488. "Recitavi illi libros quoscunque ille vellet et quos ad manum haberemus."

† Asser, p. 491.

‡ "Erat enim omnino multis ex causis refertus."

and the King urges his request, when the former asks, "Does it please you that I should write this memorandum down upon a separate sheet? It is impossible to say whether we may not meet with various similar passages which please you; if that is the case we shall have the gratification of having made a separate collection." "That is a good thought," answered the King. Asser immediately arranged a quire,\* at the commencement of which he wrote the passage. He had rightly foreseen what the King would do, for the same day he had three other passages inserted. The quire was soon filled, as they daily conversed together, and during their labours came to subjects which the King desired to stamp permanently on his memory. The zeal of the King was like that of the diligent bees, who fly from flower to flower, and carry the sweet juice to the safety of their cells.

It is evident that the industry of Alfred was purely collective; his learning, therefore, was naturally of the same kind. He instructed himself, and, while doing so, stored up a treasure for his

\* [For the general reader, this use of the word quire may require explanation. The words in Asser are, "Quod ego audiens et gaudens festinus *quaternionem* promptam paravi." In the Middle Ages books were written in separate bundles, which were afterwards bound together. Each bundle consisted of four pieces of vellum, doubled each into two leaves, and slipped one within the other, so as to answer exactly to the modern sheet folded into octavo. Each bundle, from the circumstance that it invariably consisted of four pieces, was called a *quaternio*, from which our word quire is derived, though we now apply it somewhat differently. It was one of these quires that Asser is represented as preparing for King Alfred.—ED.]

people. It is only thus that we can interpret the strange assertion of his biographer, that on the very same day—which is expressly mentioned as being the 11th November,\* St. Martin's day—on which the quotation, which was probably Latin, was committed to writing, the King commenced at once to read and then commentate in Saxon on what he had read, with the purpose of instructing others. This brief notice affords us a striking picture of the origin, progress and aim of his studies. How rapidly the King learned Latin is certainly not recorded, but that he did learn it is shown by those works of his which are still extant.

From a scholar, he in a short time became an author, and his labours in this department were first based upon the memorandum-book commenced by Asser. The King had devoted this to his own special use, for the purpose of learning the passages that might be collected in it, and making use of them as occasion required. The writings of the authors which he read afforded rich materials for making notes, so that in a short time the book grew to the bulk of a Psalter; and as he continually had it by him day and night, he called it his manual.†

\* Asser, p. 492: "In venerabili Martini solemnitate." The occurrence is mentioned under the year 887, shortly after the last annalistic fragment of the work and at the commencement of the last and greatest episode. According to p. 488, Asser was already at Leonaforð in the year 885, and began his instruction immediately.

† Asser, p. 492. "Quem Enchiridion suum, id est manulem librum nominari voluit, eo quod ad manum illum die noctuque solertissimè habebat." From the very consequent description in

Unfortunately, all our endeavours to find a copy of this work among the manuscript treasures of Saxon England have hitherto been in vain, although it must have been generally known in the middle of the twelfth century. According to the fragments which have come down to us, especially those of William of Malmesbury, it must have contained, besides the collection of various passages from Latin authors, the King's own notes upon the earlier history of his people, and especially of his own house. But very few of these invaluable fragments have been preserved. What important remarks have, perhaps, been lost with this singular book !\* To judge from the historical notices which were contained in it, it must have been Alfred's only original work, since the others that we have of him consist of translations which, however, on account of the peculiar

Asser, it follows that the manual was not identical with the prayer-book. Wright, "Biogr. Brit." lib. I. p. 395, nevertheless, unites the two into one, and says it contained "prayers, psalms, and his daily observations." Now nothing at all is said of the last, but the author perhaps mistakes Asser's "orationes" for "observations."

\* W. Malmesb. II. § 123. "*Liber proprius, quem patriâ linguâ Enchiridion, id est manualement librum appellavit.*" The individual fragments are to be found in W. Malmesbury, "*Vita Aldhelmi*" (Wharton, *Anglia Sacra*), p. 2, on the relationship of Kentarus, the father of Aldhelm, to the West-Saxon royal family; and, p. 4, on Aldhelm's song, and its effect upon the common people. Further, in "*Florent. Genealog.*" p. 693 (ed. 1592), on the government of Kenfus, "*Secundum dicta regis Ælfredi.*" In the catalogue which has come down to us of the library of a Norman monastery (MS. Bodl. 163, fol. 251), of the time of Henry the First, one book is named "*Ælfredi regis liber Anglicus.*"



freedom that he has taken with his originals, contain a great deal that is new.

Among these various productions, the translation of the famous Treatise on Consolation of Boethius has always been characterized as Alfred's most excellent work. It is well-known in what high respect this work of the last poet and philosopher among the Romans was held by the whole Middle Ages. It was of a didactic character, in which the few relics of classicality which remained at the time of Gothic rule, are singularly united with much talent, and not without artistic beauty, to the increasing consciousness of a new epoch. Amidst the wants and privations of a terrible prison, into which the powerful arm of an angry German had thrown him, the Roman consoled himself by the doctrines and conversation of Wisdom, who is represented as speaking. In this work, according to the old Roman custom, the noble doctrines of the Peripatetics and Stoics are illustrated by examples from antique traditions and narratives, but the belief and trust in one God, the creator of heaven and earth, whose gospel has commenced its conquering course from the centre of the Old World, already penetrates with preponderating force. The faith of the Latin Church received, in the course of time, with the book of the last Roman, as it were, an inheritance from the old classic times, which it carefully cultivated, and flourished on the reanimated and ever young literature of Greece and Rome, until its foundations were shaken by the more liberal and universal spirit of German Protestantism, when the latter had arrived



at maturity. Since that time, Boethius, in the presence of brighter stars, lost the lustre which surrounded him in the Middle Ages. Nevertheless in these centuries of transition from an old to a new epoch, his work was particularly adapted to be the school-book of all philosophical and grammatical learning, and had passed into the very existence of the erudite monastics.

The great influence of the monastic schools is very evident, from the fact that as soon as a newly-formed language began to produce, we meet with a version of Boethius in it; this is also the case with all the most ancient remains of the old High Germans, the Provençals and the Northern French; even Chaucer formed himself upon it when he gave England its language. It was presented to the Anglo-Saxons by their best prose writer, their King himself. Instructed by ecclesiastics in the literature of his time, Alfred appears to have studied this book, and to have applied himself to its translation before turning his attention to any other. He was not, at that time, sufficiently master of the Latin to rely on himself alone, and it was therefore necessary for Asser to explain and simplify many passages of the original text.\* This process is, perhaps, still perceptible in the condensed form of

\* "W. Malmsb." II. § 122. "Hic" (Asserio, according to William's mode of writing) "sensum librorum Boetii 'De Consolatione' planioribus verbis enodavit, quos rex ipse in Anglicam linguam vertit." Likewise in the "Gest. Pontif." II. p. 248, with the addition: "Illis diebus labore necessario, nostris ridiculo. Sed enim jussu regis factum est, ut leviùs ab eodem in Anglicum transferretur sermonem."

the translation in which even some sections of the original are entirely omitted, but the whole character of the work corresponds too closely with the other productions of Alfred for this to be of much consequence. It may here be remarked, in reference to the other translations, once for all, that the King treated the original matter with great freedom, and very seldom adhered to the letter of the work. If, therefore, on the one hand, it is a difficult task to prove that he was well acquainted with Latin, or rather though we must, from the obvious errors in his translations, infer his knowledge of it to have been defective, on the other hand, the method he adopted afforded a wider field for his labours, as it enabled him to appear as an original writer, unfettered by the letter of the original work. In this manner, not only does the transformation of individual ideas \* in a manner peculiar to his nationality appear in almost every line, but the Roman sentiments and feelings are extended or completely displaced by those of the King himself.

This may be proved by a few examples in Boethius. Well-known stories from the Roman

\* The most surprising is the name which he puts in the place of Fabricius. Boethius, II. 7, v. 15, asks: "Ubi nunc fidelis ossa Fabricii manent?" "Ælfred Boeth." ed. Cardale, p. 106, translates: "Hwæt sint nu þæs foremæran, and þæs wisan gold-smiðes ban welondes?" Grimm, "Mythologie," p. 351, conjectures that the old skilful god of the north had supplied the place of Fabricius, as Alfred may have mistaken "faber" (smith) for Fabricius. The belief in his existence had long died away, but Alfred shows that he was well acquainted with the national epopee. Compare Kemble, "Saxons," I. p. 421.

authors, such as those of Orpheus and Eurydice, or of Ulysses, extend in the amplification which Alfred gave them far beyond the limits of the originals. After giving the contents of the verses in which Boethius treats of Nero, he adds reflections upon the tyrannical application of power, and refers the reader for an example to the tyrant in question. In every instance where, in the Latin, the author speaks of the nothingness of earthly splendour, Alfred's noble soul always finds words full of deep and genuine humanity, that excel even the forcible words of Boethius himself. Finally, when following the third book of Boethius, he comes to speak of the nature of God, and man's relation to him, he throws off all the restraint which had hitherto induced him to adhere more or less to the text, and writes freely from his heart his own feelings and thoughts with regard to God's goodness, wisdom and holiness. It is a very difficult task to make a proper selection from so rich a harvest, where Alfred's own original thoughts meet the reader at every turn; we will, therefore, content ourselves with one example.

In his second book, Boethius\* says in a short sentence that he had not in any case been guided by ambition, but had only been desirous of meeting with a subject on which to write, in order that virtue might not grow out of fashion from long silence. The King profits by this opportunity to

\* II. p. 7. "Tum ego, Scis, inquam, ipsa minimum nobis ambitionem mortalium rerum fuisse dominatam: sed materiam gerendis rebus optavimus, quo ne virtus tacita consenesceret."

develope minutely his principles of government. Material and instruments are necessary for every kind of labour. The materials that a king requires in order to govern are a dense population, and a full representation of the three principal classes, those who pray, those who bear arms, and those who labour. In order to support them properly, he must have lands and presents, weapons, bread, beer and clothes to give them, according to the wants of each. Without these he cannot keep instruments necessary for his calling, and without the instruments he cannot fulfil the task allotted to him. He then goes on to state that it has been his constant endeavour to use them in a proper manner, but no kind of virtue or power is of any avail without knowledge. What, therefore, is foolishly done can never be of any use. "I can assert this, in all truth," he continues, "that, during the whole course of my existence, I have always striven to live in a becoming manner, and at my death to leave my descendants a worthy memorial of me in my works."\*

Such a confession on the part of the king and hero is so noble and great, that even to the latest ages, whoever reads it will be filled with astonishment and admiration.

The preface to the Anglo-Saxon Boethius cannot possibly have been written by Alfred himself; it is for the most part taken from the preface to the

\* "Alfred's Boethius," ed. Cardale, p. 92: "pæt is nu hraðost to secganne. pæt ic wilnode weorþfullice to libbane þa hwile þe ic lifede, and æfter minum life þam monnum to læfanne þe æfter me wæren min gemynd on godum weorcum."

translation of the Pastoral of Gregory the Great, but it is to us an old and valuable testimony that he was the author of the translation, and at the same time speaks of the method which he adopted in his book.

“King Alfred was the commentator of this work, which he translated from Latin into English. Sometimes he put word for word, sometimes sense for sense, according as he was able to explain most clearly and intelligibly the various and manifold temporal matters contained in it. It would be a difficult task to enumerate the different things which in his days, happened to the countries which he governed. Nevertheless he studied this book, and translated it from the Latin into the English language, and afterwards he made it into verses, as it now is. But he prays every one who desires to read the book, in God’s name, to pray for him, and not to blame him if he should understand it better than he was able to do. For every one should, according to the ability of his understanding, say what he says and do what he does.”

The transition to the book itself consists of a brief historical introduction, which is unquestionably the production of Alfred’s pen, since his capacity for historical knowledge, which is also recognizable on other occasions, is to be recognized in this work as well. This introduction treats of the times of Theoderic, but in a strain of thought that the author had derived from the unfavourable accounts disseminated by the Church; the consciousness of his having to do with a prince so nearly related to himself by nationality and an equally elevated posi-

tion, is hardly perceptible in what he says about Theoderic. Only a few of the ancient Gothic Sagas, contained in Jornandes, glimmer through the work. The Goths come from Scythia; Rædgota and Eal-leric\* reign; they receive under their dominion all Italy, between the mountains and the island of Sicily; Theoderic is an Amaling.† Although a Christian, and, in the commencement mild and just towards the Romans, he becomes attached to the Arian heresies, and, in consequence, does a great deal of harm, causes the Pope to be executed, and treats the learned and wise Boethius in a cruel manner. This is sufficient to prove that Alfred's Theoderic is much more the diabolical tyrant of the orthodox party, than the mighty old hero of Bern, met with in the German Saga.

Alfred's Boethius must, in its time, have been a very popular book, as it is not only mentioned by the more recent chroniclers, such as Malmesbury and others, but has even been preserved, in two old manuscripts, up to the present day.‡

\* Compare the "Song of the Wandering Minstrel," in the "Cod. Exon." ed. Thorpe, p. 322, 3, 4; J. Grimm, "Geschichte der Deutschen Sprache," p. 446.

† "He wæs Amaling." Kemble, "Saxons," I. p. 424, is of opinion that Alfred can have taken no Roman authority for this definition.

‡ MS. Cotton. Otho A. VI. sec. X. almost destroyed by the fire; copy of the same by Junius, in Oxford; MS. Bodley, 180, sec. XII; init. Editions of Rawlinson, 1698, and Cardale, 1829. There was one manuscript in the library of Leofric, Bishop of Exeter, in the middle of the eleventh century. Compare Wanley "Catal. Lib. MS." p. 80.

The conversion of the same materials into Anglo-Saxon verse, which is mentioned in the Prose Preface,\* appears, on many accounts and from manifold contradictions, not to be Alfred's work. The person who undertook the later copy of the work, and who probably lived towards the end of the following century, seems, most unquestionably, to have had Alfred's translation before him, although he certainly did not know how to use it faithfully.†

The next work, which at the present day possesses far greater attractions for us than Boethius, is the version of the Universal History of Orosius. The motive for the King's undertaking this task must be sought for in his wish to render all the information then current concerning the ancient world accessible to the lay portion of the community. He did not enjoy a rich collection from which to choose, when he selected the scanty and incorrect patchwork history of the Spanish priest; all better authorities were buried in oblivion for him, as they were for his contemporaries. Chance had caused the unlearned Orosius to undertake the labours of the historian; he became acquainted with the Father of the Church, St. Augustin, when the latter was employed, in the year 410, with the eleventh book of his work, "*De Civitate Dei*."‡ St. Augustin spoke

\* "And geworhte hi eft to leoðe." MS. Bodl.

† See the particulars in Wright, "*Biogr. Brit. Lit.*" I. pp. 56, 57, 400, et seq. The MS. is almost entirely destroyed. Fox's edition, 1835.

‡ "*Augustinus de Origine Animæ Hominis, ad Beatum Hieronymum*," ed. Benedict. II. p. 759.



to his friend of his conviction that the accusation which the heathen writers advanced against Christianity, of its having reduced the Roman world to total destruction, was a lie, and persuaded him to come to the support of this opinion by an historical work written in a corresponding spirit. Orosius accordingly began with the first man, and continued his history of the sufferings of all the nations of the earth, down to Alaric and Athaulf, who were both the terror of Rome. The object of the work recommended it to the orthodox clergy, who turned with repugnance from all better works for their instruction. Writers like Trogus Pompeius, Justin,\* Livy, and Polybius, whom Orosius had used in a superficial manner, were now completely forgotten.

Alfred again treats the original text in the manner already described; he adheres to the principle of only taking what appears to him suitable under the circumstances. On this account, he entirely omits the dedication to St. Augustin, as well as several other entire portions of the work, and compresses seven books into six.† In almost every chapter, however, besides the omissions, we find

\* In Alfred's "Orosius," ed. Barrington, p. 37, these two authors are mentioned, after Oros. I. 8, in the following terms: "Pompeius se hæðena scop and his knight Justinus wæron ðus singende."

† The only manuscript we possess, at present, bears the title "Hormesta Orosii," which has not yet been explained. There are also Latin manuscripts of Orosius, bearing the title of "Hormesta," or "Hormesia Mundi." Compare "Orosius," ed. Haverkamp, Leyden, 1738.



several alterations, paraphrases or small additions, of which we will here mention the most remarkable.

When Orosius, in the geographical summary of the Ancient World, with which he prefaces the chronicle, treats of Hibernia, the King remarks of the neighbouring island, that, on account of its being situated nearer the setting sun, the weather is warmer there than in Britain.\* Orosius mentions the refusal of M. Fabius, after his dearly-bought victory over the inhabitants of Veii, to accept the triumph offered him by the Senate. Alfred appends to this a description of a Roman triumph, but his authorities are unfortunately not known. He paints the entry of victorious consuls in cars magnificently adorned and drawn by white horses, and also gives a description of the procession of the Senate. There is, also, a remark on the office of the two first authorities of old Rome.† Attalus leaves his land to the Romans, "to boclande," exactly after the fashion of a king of the West-Saxons.‡ The three expeditions of Julius Cæsar into Britain, are reduced to one; but he knows that the spot at which Cæsar crossed the Thames, previous to his last victory over the Britons, was somewhere in the neighbourhood of Wallingford.§ We are told that, under Commodus, the Capitol was struck with lightning, when, besides other buildings, the library there was destroyed. Alfred here inserts, from a preceding

\* Ælfr. p. 30. Oros. I. p. 2. † Ælfr. p. 66. Oros. II. p. 5.

‡ Ælfr. p. 184. Oros. V. p. 10. § Ælfr. p. 196. Oros. VI. p. 9.

section of the original work, the passage: "and all their old books were burnt there. There was as much harm done as in the town of Alexandria, in the library of which place, four hundred thousand books were burnt;"—namely, during Cæsar's stay there, when the fleet was devoured by the flames.\* The respect that Alfred, who was a great collector of books, felt for so large a number of them, would not allow him to omit this passage.

From these examples it is very evident how much new matter of his own Alfred inserted in his version of the original work; but there is one considerable and celebrated interpolation in the beginning of the book, that, unquestionably, is one of the most important monuments of Alfred's labours that have reached us. It consists of a sketch of the large tracts of country, designated by Alfred as Germania, and of original accounts given by two northern mariners.† Alfred was acquainted with Ptolemy's geographical principles, and, finding that they were followed by Orosius in his second chapter, adopted them unconditionally in reference to the three quarters of the globe. We have already spoken, in the proper place, of his relations to Rome, Palestine, and India. In the North alone he knows more than his author; he

\* Ælfr. p. 221. Oros. VII. p. 16, VI. 15, with which compare also Parthey, "Das Alexandrinische Museum," p. 32.

† I found the following assertions entirely on Dahlmann's excellent arguments in his "Forschungen," I. p. 401, et seq., which, in all the details against Scandinavian pretensions remain unrefuted.

quietly corrects erroneous assertions, and, in addition, gives a description of all the countries where, during the ninth century, the German language was spoken. The boundaries of his Germania run along the Rhine and Danube, and extend from the Mediterranean to the Gulf of Bothnia ; they are more extensive and defined with greater certainty than those formerly given by Tacitus. The German territories, properly so called, are divided by him into two great districts, the more southern, which he endeavours to fix as beginning from the East-Franks, and the more northern one from the Old-Saxons.\* He then draws the eastern boundary, looking towards the Slaves ; and, lastly, treats of the countries of the North and South Danes, as well as of the Swedes, who are reckoned as belonging to the Germans.

After this, we have the account given by Ohthere to his lord, King Alfred,† and which occupies a prominent place in the history of discoveries. The narrator was a very wealthy mariner and whaler from the district of Halgoland, on the northern coast of Norway. In the course of his travels, undertaken probably for the purpose of disposing of the whales he had caught, he must have visited England and become known to the King, who was always anxious to acquire information. He remained in the King's service for some time. The idea of increasing our knowledge of this Ohthere,

\* Dahlmann, p. 418.

† "Ohthere sæde his hlaforde Ælfrede kyninge," etc. *Ælfr.* p. 21.

by proving his historical identity, and endeavouring to show that he is the same person as a similarly-named leader of the hordes that came to seek spoil in England, is an idle piece of folly on the part of Scandinavian scholars.\* Ohthere informed the King that he had sailed to the north as far as the land extends in that direction, and then, following the land when it turns to the east, had finally reached a great stream (the White Sea), the coasts of which, as he found, were only inhabited by Finlanders. Among the latter the Beormas, who spoke almost the same language, were the only persons who tilled the ground. Ohthere paid a visit to their king, and compares their mode of living with his own. The second portion of his narration contains an account of the long distance that Scandinavia extends towards the south, and of Ohthere's voyage from his native place, Halgoland, past Sciringesheal (in Christiania Bay), probably through the Great Belt to Schleswig (æt Hæðum).†

The other sailor, from whose mouth Alfred wrote the second account, was a certain Wulfstan, whose native-place is not known, and who sailed from Schleswig to a spot called Truso; which was, probably, situated on the Fresh-Haff, in what is now Prussia. He was the first to give a description of the Esthonians who inhabited that coast.‡

Neither of these accounts, however, dispelled the erroneous idea which obtained in the preceding

\* Dahlmann, p. 410.

† Ibid., pp. 427, 443.

‡ Ælfred, p. 25, et seq.

centuries, that Scandinavia was a large island and that the Gulf of Bothnia, or Quæen-Sea, flowed into the North Sea. In spite of this, however, Alfred will always be entitled to the gratitude of all future ages for his meritorious efforts to extend our knowledge of the globe by recording these statements, and for his own truly great German notion of an ethnography of Germania. These efforts elevate the King, who was so fond of historical and topographical researches, to the rank of a geographer, indisputably the greatest one of his age. But how few are there at present who know anything of his merit in this particular, or can estimate it according to its worth! \*

As Orosius treated of the kingdoms of the heathens, and, in some measure, of the universal history of the ancient world, so did the royal author's own great countryman, Bede, furnish him, in his invaluable work, with materials for a Christian history, as well as for one of his own people. There can be no doubt that Alfred gave up the considera-

\* At present there is only one manuscript known of the Saxon Orosius, MS. Cotton. Tiber. B. I. plainly written and almost contemporaneous; MS. Lauderdale, which should have been in the possession of Lady Dysart, was not to be found. There is a copy by Junius, in Oxford. Sir John Spelman first gave a Latin translation of the geographical portions in his "*Vita Ælfredi*." In 1773, Daines Barrington published the whole book, together with a geographical dissertation by Reinhold Forster. Since that period, although the want of a good edition has been much felt, none has been published. Only some detached portions, among which are the Germania, and the narratives of the travels, are printed, with critical observations, by Thorpe, "*Analecta Anglo-Saxonica*," p. 81, et seq. ed. ii.

tion of the whole subject to devote himself to a particular branch, when he resolved to translate, for the sake of the laity, Bede's national work, which, up to that period, was accessible to the clergy alone. Bede composed his history of the church at the beginning of the eighth century, in order to preserve among the Angles and Saxons the memory of their conversion, and the extension of the Christian faith among them. Many considerable portions of his work, however, are of a temporal nature, and treat of the development of the various petty principalities which the German settlers established in the conquered island. As Bede lived in the north of England, and never left that part of the country during the whole course of a long life, his information is most minute and most certain when he is describing his own immediate neighbourhood. He derived most of his knowledge respecting the southern part of the island from hearsay alone ; but he succeeded in weaving into his narrative, many peculiar national elements which existed in the form of sagas, and which we meet at a later period in the Saxon Annals. On this account, especially, he ranks third in the list of the first historians of the Teutonic peoples ; although by the superior arrangement of his materials, by his strict adherence to a higher standard of excellence, and, above all, by his immense store of knowledge, he rises far above Jornandes the Goth, Gregory of Tours, and Paul the Deacon. His reputation penetrated, even during his life-time, as far as Rome, and soon extended over Western Europe.

It was not until a hundred and fifty years after Bede's death that his book was translated—that this was done by Alfred is certainly not evident from any passage in the translation, in which the King's name does not occur, and which has no introduction from his pen. But there is no scarcity of early witnesses to prove that he alone could be the author.\* It is, in fact, probable that when the editors of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, who must have commenced their labours soon after the year 890, consulted Bede's work, already possessed Alfred's translation, since they introduce into the Chronicle an error committed by him.†

In conformity with the object he had in view, Alfred composed an abridgment of the larger history of his people, and evidently endeavoured to adapt it to the southern portion of the island. For this reason all the detailed accounts of the relations existing between the church at York and

\* W. Malmesb. II. § 123, gives a list of the works: "Orosius," "Pastoralis Gregorii," and "Gesta Anglorum Bedæ." The most ancient witness is Archbishop Alfrie, about the year 1000, in his "Homily on Day III. Id. Martis. Sti Gregorii papæ urbis Romanæ inclyti, Historia Anglorum, ða ðe Ælfred cyning of Ledene on Englisc awende;" Thorpe, "The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church," II. p. 116. Layamon, in his "Brut," (ed. Sir F. Madden, I. p. 2), about 1205, used the translation:

"He nam þa Englisca boc,  
þa makede seint Beda."

† Bede, I. p. 9. "Maximus imperator creatus est," is translated by Alfred: "Se casere was acemed" (born). And thus, also, "Chron. Sax." A. 381, "wæs geboren." Compare R. Schmid, "Geschichte des Angelsächs Rechts," p. LVII. N. 1.

the neighbouring Scots, who were of a different religion, are omitted; while, on the other hand, the history of the first Christian kings of Wessex is translated word for word. The same is the case with the account of the first conversion of the people to Christianity. Most of the documents introduced by Bede into his works, as well as the letters of the bishops and popes, are omitted. There are a few exceptions; such, for instance, is the first missive of Gregory the Great, which, however, is only given in an abridged form and in the third person. The hymns, too, composed by Bede upon saints and bishops, do not appear in the translation; but then again, the national story of the poet, Cædmon, is faithfully retained, and the specimen of his poetical skill translated into Saxon verse, which, in accordance with the other conclusions at which we have arrived, must be Alfred's own, for Cædmon himself wrote in the Anglian dialect.\* Alfred did not think himself justified in depriving his people of the miracles related by Bede. There is one peculiarity in the work, and that is, that he precedes the introduction with a general list of all the various chapters, including those which he has omitted.† These few remarks

\* [The inference here is not at all necessary:—if Alfred introduced a fragment of an Anglian poem into his book, he would of course write it in the West-Saxon dialect. The same poetry would be repeated by the minstrel in Northumberland in the Anglian dialect, in Kent in the Kentish, and in Wessex in West-Saxon. This was always the case in the minstrelsy of the Middle Ages.—ED.]

† Wheloc, Bede, p. 8. Smith, Bede, pp. 479, 480.



will suffice, perhaps, to give an idea of the character of the work on which the writer has bestowed far less pains than he did on all his other productions, and in which we find no additions to make up for the frequent omissions. It is a matter of astonishment, however, that Alfred did not seize this opportunity of supplying, from his own knowledge, of which we have spoken in another place, any deficiencies in the early history of Wessex, of which Bede had learnt but little. These defects, however, are no reason why the translation of Bede should, in the present day, be almost entirely neglected.\*

All Alfred's other works were of a theological nature; he must have taken an especial pleasure in the writings of Gregory the Great; for, after he had become acquainted with them himself, he took measures to diffuse them, in the language of the country, for the welfare and advantage of his clergy and of the people committed to their charge. Gregory, who was the first of all the Popes to take a prominent position in the history of the world, had, by his deeds, closely and eternally interwoven his own history with that of the British Island. It was owing to his strenuous exertions that the Teutonic conquerors of the island were won over to Chris-

\* There is one manuscript of this work in the University Library at Cambridge; another, MS. Corp. Christi Coll. Cambr. 41; MS. Cotton. Otho B. XI. was burnt. There are the editions of Wheloc, 1643, and Smith, 1722, as supplements to the original. It is much to be regretted that Stevenson did not publish the work with his excellent text of the "*Historia Ecclesiastica*" (English Historical Society," A. 1838).

tianity, and Alfred, in the name of the people, wished to render him thanks for such a boon, by making the latter acquainted with the literary works of this prince of the church. From the great number of the Gregorian writings, which, far and wide, had become the public property of the Catholic Church, Alfred first selected that on the Care of the Soul: "that book, so full of a deep knowledge of human nature and pious feeling—that book which teaches us, so simply and so completely, the great art of wisely and gently governing our souls." \* Gregory had written the "*Regula Pastoralis*" at the beginning of his pontificate, when he was reproached with having wished to escape by flight from the election which nominated him to the Papal See. † "He had collected in it many things that are scattered in different places through his works: he endeavoured to show in it by what means and by what disposition of mind the spiritual pastor ought to obtain his office, how he ought to conduct himself in his office, how he ought to vary his manner of addressing his hearers so as to suit their several conditions, and how, in the case of his exertions being crowned with success, he ought to guard against arrogance. This book exercised, during the following centuries, a considerable influence in exciting a better feeling among the clergy, and an endeavour to improve the condition of the church. The reformatory synods under Charlemagne adopted it as

\* Stolberg, "*Leben des grossen Alfred*," p. 271.

† Lau, "*Gregor I. der Grosse*," p. 315.

the law of their proceedings for the improvement of the ecclesiastical profession." \* From the Franks, Gregory's reputation, and the conviction of his excellence, penetrated to the Saxons, and their King's translation of his work was chiefly instrumental in bringing about this result. The original work itself, however, was one of the books which Gregory had formerly given to St. Augustin, and which, as late as the fifteenth century, were in the library of the monastery at Canterbury.†

Alfred cannot have undertaken the translation until after the year 890, that is, after he had occupied himself for several years with similar works. In the preface, which we have mentioned several times in the preceding section, besides Asser, Grimbold and John, he also thanks his Archbishop Plegmund for the assistance he has received. In this instance, too, he sometimes translated word for word, and sometimes merely gave the sense, according as these men deemed it feasible or not so to do. In spite of the comparatively larger number of manuscripts, however, his translation has not yet been printed. The few Anglo-Saxon scholars capable of the task have been prevented from undertaking it by their ignorance of the subject which,

\* Neander, "Allgemeine Geschichte der Christlichen Religion und Kirche," III. Fourth Section, p. 1.

† Alfred himself, in the poetical introduction, "MS. Hatton," 20, says :—

"þis ærend gewrit. Agostinus.  
Ofer sealtne sæ. suðan brohtæ."

Compare Wanley, "Catal. Libr. MSS." p. 172.

in our times, has lost its former importance. It would, however, have been very easy for any one to convince himself, by a comparison of several chapters of the manuscripts now at Oxford with the Latin text, that the King followed the latter far more faithfully than he had done when translating Boethius and Orosius, where he had much more frequent opportunities of allowing his own thoughts and knowledge full play. He appears, also, to have omitted nothing essential, for the great feature of his plan was to present Gregory's work to all his subjects in the entire state in which it was known to the few who understood Latin.

But he has left us the most noble memorial of his spirit and his pen in the excellent preface, in which he not only states the object he had in view when publishing this particular book, but the far higher one, never attained by any other temporal ruler, which induced him to devote himself to study. He wanted, by his own example, to restore learning that had entirely disappeared, and it was for this reason that he alluded in such forcible words to the more happy state of things in former days, but which, however, might be again attained by educating and instructing the young. He also greatly desired that some means should be taken to remedy the general scarcity of books, and he, therefore, took care that a copy of the "Pastoral," with a golden tablet worth fifty mancusses,\* was sent to every bishop in

\* "Ond to ælcum bisecep-stole ðn minum rice wille ane onsendan. ond on ælere bið ân æstel. se bið on fitegum mances-san." MS. Hatton, 20.

his kingdom. Three of these copies, with a dedication to Plegmund Archbishop of Canterbury, Werfrith Bishop of Worcester, and Wulfsige Bishop of Sherburne, have been preserved up to the present day, and agree wonderfully with each other in the form of the handwriting.

To the preface is added a poetical introduction, and, at the end of the book, there is an appendix, also in verse, and generally containing the same thoughts as the preface, but couched in the peculiar form of expression of Anglo-Saxon poetry which leant towards Nature, and her example. These verses have, as yet, attracted too little attention; as, however, they form part of the original manuscripts, it appears unquestionable that they were from the pen of Alfred himself. But at present there is no chance of their being published, anymore than the entire translation.\*

There was another work of Gregory the Great which was translated; not by Alfred himself, however, but by his friend Werfrith, Bishop of Worcester. The great Pope had formerly composed the book in question at the urgent request of his friends, who begged him to give an account of the lives and miracles of the Italian saints. In doing

\* Manuscripts: MS. Hatton, 20, in Bibl. Bodl.; MS. Bibl. Publ. Univ. Camb.; MS. Cotton. Tiber. B. XI., injured by the fire. MS. Cotton. Otho B. II. which was burnt, had been sent to Helstan, Bishop of London. In addition to these, there are two more recent copies in Trinity College and Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. The preface was printed in Parker's Asser, 1574, in Wise's Asser, 1722, and in Wright, "Biogr. Brit. Lit." I. p. 397.

this, he materially increased the superstition of his own times, and that of succeeding centuries, by the publication of a number of the most incredible and frequently most absurd legends, and he likewise, in this patchwork production, appears to have made the Roman Catholic Church in particular a present of the theory of purgatory. As he presented these stories without any connection with each other, and in the form of conversations with his intimate friend the Deacon Peter, he gave them the suitable name of "Dialogues." These dialogues soon became a popular book in every country, and were even translated into Arabic and Greek.\*

Bishop Werfrith did not undertake the translation of his own accord. The King commissioned him to do it, and this work must have been closely connected with those of a similar nature executed by Alfred. It is, however, strange to find it already mentioned by Asser,† who does not yet give a separate list of Alfred's works, because, as we may suppose, he wrote his biography precisely at the time that he assisted Alfred in his literary labours. Among the many miraculous stories in the book were also many that referred to circumstances that had really happened. Thus, for instance, the Life and Deeds of the Holy Benedict were connected with

\* Lau, "Gregor I. der Grosse," p. 315.

† Asser, p. 486, "Werfrithum — qui imperio regis libros Dialogorum Gregorii papæ et Petri sui discipuli de Latinitate prius in Saxoniam linguam, aliquando sensum ex sensu ponens, elucubratim et elegantissimè interpretatus est." Compare "W. Malmesb." II. § 122, "jussu regis."

the history of the later kings of the East-Goths; and here, again, we may conclude that Alfred felt interested in the fate of a race so nearly related to his own.

No one has yet been willing to undertake the publication of the Saxon translation. Yet it is sufficiently evident from one of the manuscripts, and also from Asser's testimony, that Werfrith imitated his King's example by not following strictly the letter of the original work. Further, it is probable that he had only met with a selection of the legends, and hardly translated half of the four books contained in the Latin text.\*

The few words which serve as introduction to the "Dialogues" were, perhaps, written by Alfred himself: at any rate, they were written in his name, and in conformity with his suggestions. We are informed therein, that, from the perusal of religious works, he had arrived at the conviction that it was incumbent on him, whom God had endowed with such temporal honours, to turn his attention now and then from the affairs of this world to divine and holy subjects. He had, therefore, begged his faithful friend † to translate some such books, which treated of the doctrines and miracles of the saints, in order that he might comfort and strengthen his courage by them, when he was oppressed by the

\* I have only looked at MS. Hatton, 76, in Bibl. Bodl. sec. XI. It certainly is very fragmentary. The only other copy that has been preserved is MS. Corp. Christ. Coll. Camb. N. 322, sec. XI.

† "And ic forþan sohte and wilnode to minum getrywum freondum," etc. MS. Hatton. 76.

troubles of this earth. The translation was, therefore, designed principally for himself. He was a true child of his own times and found pleasure in the superstitions that then prevailed.

There is, also, another translation from the writings of the most ancient Fathers of the Church which possesses some claims to be considered one of Alfred's performances. This is the "Anglo-Saxon Anthology" from a work of St. Augustin. The Bishop of Hippo Regius composed the two short books of Soliloquies, about the year 387, before he had taken a part in the great dogmatical disputes. He treated therein of the salvation of the soul as only to be attained by faith, love, and hope, and of the difference between truth and error, towards the former of which the soul yearned, since the soul itself is the seat of truth, and, therefore, immortal. These ideas are worked out in a similar fashion to that afterwards adopted by Boethius: they are cast in the form of a conversation between the author and Reason, and it was from this fact that St. Augustin chose this title for his little work.\* In the only manuscript of the Saxon Selection which we possess, and which is full of gaps and errors, the last fragmentary words, which are evidently intended to wind up the book, run thus:—"Here end the sayings which King Alfred took from the book which we call . . . ."† This,

\* "S. Augustini Opera," ed. Bened. I. p. 426.

† "ðær endiað þa cwiðas þe Ælfred kining alæs of þære bec þe we hatað on . . . ." MS. Cotton. Vitellius A. 15, sec. XII. Junius's copy in Oxford.



however, is the only testimony we have that Alfred composed the Selection, for none of our authorities mention it with his other works. We may perhaps, look upon the preface, as another proof. It is written in a strain of thought that is not without merit, and possesses certain peculiar features that characterized the prefatory remarks which Alfred was in the habit of writing; but unfortunately, like the rest of the book, it has reached us in a very mutilated form. The author draws a comparison between the collecting of the wood necessary for the erection of an earthly house and the materials requisite for building the heavenly home promised us through St. Augustin, St. Gregory, St. Jerome and many other holy Fathers. He afterwards goes on to say that every man desires to enjoy the house that he holds in fee from his Lord, and which he has erected under the protection of the latter, and then alludes to our longing for the heavenly dwelling. The style is remarkable, and the execution poetical, assuming at times, through not unfrequent alliterations, a regular metrical form. Nothing is said of any particular object which the translator had in view when he undertook his task, although we may conclude, from the prefaces already mentioned, that Alfred rarely omitted some allusion of this kind. In addition to this, the whole work is written in impure Saxon, a fact that is not, perhaps, to be altogether ascribed to the more recent date of the manuscript, and the faults committed by the copyist. For these reasons it may be asserted, with quite as great a degree of probability,

that the collector and translator of the maxims, in the twelfth century, endeavoured to supply his own want of celebrity by giving out at the end of the book that it was written by the beloved monarch, whose works, at that period, were well-known and read by the people.

The Soliloquies, also, have never been printed. They will not become known before the plan of an edition of all the works ascribed to King Alfred is not only drawn up by more competent scholars than those who have hitherto treated the subject, but carried out, also, in accordance with sound critical principles.

Not only have the deeds of the King of the West-Saxons been poetically amplified, and their number augmented during the latter portion of the Middle Ages, but, as his authorship was then a well-known fact, many other works with which we are, at present, unacquainted, or in which we positively deny his having had any share, are attributed to him. As early as the end of the following century,\* we find it asserted that the number of works translated by him is unknown. Malmesbury† has a remarkable notice, that Alfred commenced translating the Psalms, but had hardly finished the first part before death snatched him from his task. This Norman monk, whose knowledge of the national language was certainly not very great, must have had some grounds for attributing to King Alfred the Anglo-Saxon Psalter then in use. We

\* Æthelweard, IV. p. 519 : "Volumina numero ignoto."

† "Gesta Reg." II. § 123.

have several copies of this work, which is even said to be the work of Aldhelm. He must have had some earlier authority for stating that the King had died while engaged in the work. In a word, this was the belief of the twelfth century: some persons asserting that only parts of the Holy Scriptures, and others that the whole Bible was translated by him.\*

About the same time that such assumptions found credit, proverbs of Alfred, in a poetic form, were already familiar in the mouths of the people.† A work of this description has been preserved in various manuscripts, and even in various dialects of the thirteenth century. Alfred is, however, not the author, but the hero of the work. It commences with a description of an assembly of many bishops and learned men, of earls and knights, which was held at Seaford, and at which King Alfred, the shepherd and the darling of England, presided. But the whole is a pure piece of fiction, and can hardly be reconciled with historic truth. Then commences a whole series of detached sections, each with the words, "Thus spoke Alfred." This formula is followed by a variety of exhortations to fear God, to practise obedience, wisdom, self-control, and various other virtues. In the

\* "Boston of Bury," and "Historia Eliensis." Compare Hearne, "Spelman's Life of King Alfred," p. 213.

† Ailred of Rievaulx, in *Æwyslen*, X. Scriptt. p. 355, "Extant parabolæ ejus, plurimum habentes ædificationis, sed et venustatis et jucunditatis." Compare "Annal. Winton," ap. Wharton, "Anglia Sacra," I. p. 289.

thirteenth section,\* Alfred addresses the discourse to his son, whose name, however, is not mentioned, and gives him similar good advice.

The substance of these proverbs recurs in the most varied forms, and at all periods, during the Middle Ages, not only in England, but in every other Teutonic country. The poem under consideration appears to have first assumed its present form in the twelfth century, and to have been written in the same language of transition to the earliest English in which we possess the long epic poem of the priest Layamon. Like another Solomon, Alfred utters the sentiments ascribed to him at a Witenagemot; and the fact that, during the rule of the Normans, the English people ascribed to their greatest king, whom they gratefully remembered, the treasures of their own primitive national wisdom, and even encircled him with romance, proves how great was the feeling of nationality which they still retained. How deeply rooted was their attachment, which was founded more upon legendary fiction than history, is especially demonstrated by the touching surname of "The darling of England," given to the King, as well as by their conviction that Alfred was the wisest and most pious man in England, and the tradition that it was he who had restored to his people their old laws, which were so dear to them, and the loss of which they so deeply regretted.

There must have been a great number of such

\* Kemble's edition of "Solomon and Saturn," p. 244 (Alfric Society).

proverbial verses generally known, for, in a somewhat later poem, allusion is made to several which are not at present to be found in the so-called "Proverbs of King Alfred."\*

Besides his versions of "Parables and Proverbs," the King is said to have prepared also, for the use of the Anglo-Saxons, a version of the "Fables of Æsop," that is, of the stories of animals, so popular with all Teutonic nations. We meet with this piece of information at the conclusion of the Norman-French Fables written by the poetess, Mary of France, in the thirteenth century, but it is probable that merely the name of the Saxon king had been adopted in copies of these Fables published in England.† Besides this, it has been clearly

\* "The Owl and the Nightingale," Kemble, "Solomon and Saturn," p. 249.

† Mary of France, Æsop, in MS. Harlei. 978, fol. 87, *b.* :—

" Por amur le cunte Willame  
 Le plus vaillant de nul realme  
 Meinteneur de cest livre feire  
 E del Engleis en romans treire  
 Æsope apelum cest livre  
 Qu'il translata e fist escrire  
 Del Griu en Latin le turna  
 Li reis Alurez qui mut l'ama  
 Le translata puis en Engleis  
 E ieo l'ai rimee en Franceis."

Roquefort, in his edition of the works of this poetess, II. pp. 34, et seq., follows another MS. and substitutes the name of "Henri" for "Alurez." In a manuscript Latin Æsop (MS. Mus. Brit. Reg. 15, A. VII.) we find the following passage: "Deinde Rex Angliæ Affrus in Anglicam linguam cum transferri præcepit."

proved that the epic series of Reynard the Fox, containing tales of animals, was indigenous only to the Franks and Saxons of the continent, and not to the Anglo-Saxons.

Lastly, we learn from a very recent authority, that is deserving of little credit, that Alfred, like the great descendant of the Hohenstauffens, Frederic II., wrote a book on Falconry. We know that, like all German princes and nobles, he was passionately fond of hunting, but the notion of his having treated the matter scientifically appears to be altogether founded on the misinterpretation of a passage in Asser, in which that author tells us that the King provided for the maintenance and instruction of all kinds of huntsmen and falconers.\*

These spurious works deserved to be cursorily mentioned, because they prove that the fact of the King of the West-Saxons having distinguished himself as a versatile writer, was still fresh in men's minds, when they were no longer able to read his genuine productions. Of these there was a large number and their existence was patent at all times, although it was not until a far more recent period, on the manifestation of a more general interest in the investigation of Teutonic languages and history, that an acquaintance with them was revived. The peculiar A Low-German copy, cited by Lappenberg in the "Götting Gelehrte. Anzeigen," April 1, 1844, speaks of a "Koning Affrus van Englant."

\* "Liber Alured Regis de custodiendis Accipitribus," in Catal. Libr. MSS. æd. Christi, A. 1315, apud Wanley, "Catal. Præf." Compare Asser, p. 486, "et falconarios et accipitrarios, canicularios quoque docere."

characteristics of Alfred's literary labours then first became gradually known and carefully studied. It was soon acknowledged that his prose-style was most pithy, and written in the purest idiom of his mother-tongue. The acquaintance, too, which we now possess of Anglo-Saxon literature proves most indubitably that, previously to Alfred's time, poetry was predominant, and that to him principally belongs the merit of having founded a school of prose composition, which, in the years immediately following his death, was most fully developed, especially in works of devotion. Alfric, the best prose writer of the tenth century, informs us that, up to his time, there existed no other religious works in Saxon, than those of King Alfred.\*

It does not appear that the noble example set by the King, to such of his subjects as nourished a love of learning, found many imitators during his lifetime. Among his teachers, ecclesiastical friends, and bishops, only Asser and Werfrith can, with any certainty, be designated as authors. Some connection may have existed between Alfred and the scholastic philosopher, John the Irishman, although it cannot be clearly proved; the latter's knowledge and learned productions, however, were most certainly not the growth of English soil.

But there is one great work bearing no author's name, which must undoubtedly be referred to the

\* Alfric's preface to his "Homilies," ed. Thorpe, I. p. 2: "buton þam bocum ðe Ælfred cyning snoterlice awende of Ledene on Englisc."



person and influence of the King, and probably owes its existence to his endeavours to revive learning and literature; this work is the "Anglo-Saxon Chronicle," the principal source of information for Alfred's life.\* The oldest manuscript† copy of these annals, which were the very first ever written in Teutonic prose, reaches in its most ancient form down to the year 891, the character in which it is written being exactly similar to that of those manuscripts of Alfred's time, that have been preserved up to the present day. As the account of Plegmund's election to the archbishopric of Canterbury is contained in that portion of the manuscript where the original character changes for one of a more recent date, the merit of introducing a fuller and more detailed style of composition into these annals has, with an utter want of anything like scholarship, been attributed to this great teacher and dignitary of the King. But an historical work of this description has never any one particular author. The monks of some cloister, situated probably in the south-eastern part of England, as the information relating to the north is all derived from Bede, and the dialect bears a slight tinge of the Anglian idiom, possessed undoubtedly some short historical notices concerning earlier ages in their calendars. Some portions

\* [It is but right to observe that all historical antiquaries do not agree in Dr. Pauli's notions regarding the age of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle; and there is certainly no reason for believing that King Alfred had anything to do with it. Perhaps it is safest to look upon it as having been commenced in the course of the tenth century.—Ed.]

\* MS. Corp. Christi Coll. Cambr. CLXXIII.



of the matter were then inserted from Bede, while others were taken from Welsh and Saxon traditions, which still, in some places, bear the evident stamp of the national ballads. This circumstance and the King's determination to raise his mother-tongue to the position formerly occupied by the Latin language, which had been forgotten, gave rise to a history written in Saxon. In addition to this, the events of the age, and the deeds of its great hero, completely changed the form of the Chronicle, which becomes more and more diffuse, a circumstance that is particularly discernible from the year 851, and this is another reason for our hardly entertaining a doubt that the Chronicle for the following forty years is contemporaneous with the events it describes. We are here again greatly tempted to suppose that we can recognise Alfred's enthusiasm for history, to which, if we are correct, we should then have to attribute the circumstance of now possessing an authentic account of at least a portion of his own life, and the history of his time. It is very certain that the first part of the Chronicle existed at the period when he was compelled, for the second time, to resume the conflict with the Danes; the composition of the succeeding part belongs to the first half of the next century, and, from that time up to the middle of the twelfth, the details of this highly remarkable literary monument continue to increase in size, joining on to one another after the manner of crystals.\*

\* Can Gaimar refer to the Chronicle when he speaks of Alfred's works in the following manner? V. 3451, et seq. :—

A large field for the display of activity both in learning and teaching was thus opened for reflective minds among the Anglo-Saxons; the King himself had been the first to lay the foundations of a national literature.

But his unceasing exertions for the advantage of his country were extended to other things, where, indeed, the results were visible ones, but where the mind was not the less actively employed. Alfred took an interest in several of the arts, and was himself very often the inventor and suggestor of the various plans adopted. Of all the works of art, however, which originated with him, we have hardly anything left, and our desire to become acquainted with the taste of Alfred and his contemporaries must still remain, as it has hitherto done, unsatisfied. With regard to architecture, it is difficult for us to say whether the sight of Rome exercised an early influence on his imagination. The whole style of the ecclesiastical architecture of the Anglo-Saxons had, since the seventh century, been closely connected with that which then extended from Rome to other countries, but whether the deep impression made on him, when a boy, by the capital of the Ancient World was the cause of his afterwards aspiring to a greater degree of perfection, in accordance with Italian models, is a question that must remain unanswered, as

“ Il fist escrivere un livre Engleis  
Des aventures, e des leis,  
E de batailles de la terre,  
E des reis ki firent la guere.”

there is, in all England, no building exhibiting traces of this description, and which we can with certainty assert to have been erected during Alfred's life. Here again we must content ourselves with collecting the scanty information transmitted by historians on this subject, and forming our own conclusions.

With regard to the buildings which were undertaken by Alfred himself, we are distinctly informed that, in erecting them, he did not pay the slightest attention to the customs of his forefathers in such cases, but that he trusted to new ideas of his own for producing something far more venerable and magnificent.\* By these buildings it is plain that we must understand churches and monasteries, and as so many sacred edifices, which were reduced to ashes, had to be rebuilt, it was very likely that a new method and a new style were introduced during their erection. Whenever it is necessary to restore anything that has been fundamentally destroyed, the mind becomes fertile in expedients from the necessity of the case, and adopts those innovations which are alone proper under the circumstances. This must have been evident in the two monasteries at Athelney and Shaftsbury, although Alfred had procured assistance from abroad for the execution of his artistic notions, in the same manner as he had done for his literary undertakings. We know that artists and artificers from the most different nations of the earth, and

\* Asser, p. 486: "*venerabiliora et pretiosiora nova suâ machinatione.*"

skilled in all kinds of work, were employed by him.\*

In the little island of Athelney, surrounded as it was by water and underwood, there was a great want of space. Besides this, Alfred was resolved that the place having once been a fortress should remain so still; surrounded by water it was only accessible from the east by means of a bridge, at the extremities of which, especially at the western one, were strong redoubts.† He caused the monastery to be built on the island itself, and had good reasons for defending it against the wildness and insecurity of the neighbourhood. We learn, from an account written in the twelfth century, at which time the whole building was in good repair, that the church was very small, but built in quite a new style of architecture. Four pillars were sunk in the ground, on account, no doubt, of the extremely moist nature of the soil, and supported the whole edifice, which rested on four circular arches that were erected upon them.‡ At Shaftsbury, Alfred is said to have built the town itself, as well as the monastery; and that, if our authority is to be believed, as early as the year 880.§ We have already spoken of the rebuilding of London. The new cathedral at Winchester, dedicated by Alfred to the Virgin, must

\* Asser, p. 495: "Ex multis gentibus collectos et in omni terreno ædificio edoctos."

† Asser, p. 493: "In cujus pontis occidentali limite arx munitissima pulcherrimâ operatione consita est."

‡ W. Malmesb. "Gesta Pontif." II. p. 255.

§ W. Malmesb. "Gesta Pontif." II. p. 251. Compare Asser, p. 495.

have been fit for the performance of service during his life-time, as Grimbald filled the office of abbot there: it was not completed, however, till the year 908, when Archbishop Plegmund consecrated the tower.\*

There were, also, in various parts of the kingdom, towns and fortified places that had to be repaired or erected afresh; and on the occasion of the war, with which the country was still menaced, breaking out again, people must soon have begun to turn their attention to walls and ramparts as a means of defence. We cannot name the towns which Alfred thus restored; and it appears that, on the whole, he did not make much progress in his designs, as the innate sluggishness of his subjects offered insurmountable obstacles to his so doing.†

At the places where he was accustomed to reside with his court, Alfred made a display of royal magnificence; the various buildings were ornamented, as usual, according to his plans,‡ with gold and silver, while the halls and royal apartments were very artistically built with stone and wood; he even had stone villas moved from the spots they at first occupied, to places more befitting a royal residence.

In every instance it was he who furnished the idea which he generally succeeded in carrying out.

\* Æthelweard, IV. p. 519.

† Asser, p. 493: "Propter pigritiam populi imperata non implentur," etc.

‡ Asser, p. 492: "Illo edocente."

We shall speak of the perfection to which he brought naval architecture when we have occasion to mention, in the next Section, the circumstances that induced him to turn his attention to it.

Among the smaller productions of the art of that period, we are at present most particularly struck by the horometer which Alfred himself invented; his biographer has given us a description of this invention. It can only have been by the constant observance of a system of the strictest punctuality that this great prince was enabled to do so much, and in so many different ways. But the blue sky, with its constellations, did not always tell the time; in his kingdom there were many dark clouds and frequent showers that prevented him measuring the hours by the sun and moon. Alfred's inventive mind, however, soon extricated him from this difficulty: he caused his chaplains, Athelstan and Werwulf, with whose names we are acquainted, to bring him a sufficient quantity of wax, of which he weighed a portion equal in weight to seventy-two pence.\* Out of this mass he had six tapers made, all of exactly equal weight, and each twelve inches long, with indentations in them at every inch. These six tapers used to burn day and night, for four-and-twenty hours, before the relics of the saints that he took with him on all his journeys; but here again, the influence of the weather seemed to threaten his plans with failure. The violent winds, that often blew without ceasing for days together,

\* Asser, p. 496: "*Tanta cera quæ septuaginta duos denarios pensaret.*"

used to find their way through the thin doors and windows of the churches, as well as the cracks in the walls and flooring, and the slight covering of the tents. The light either went out, leaving the King in darkness, or else it burnt down more quickly than it should have done in order to reach again the same astronomical point at which the commencement of each day was fixed. Alfred obviated this in the following manner: he had a lantern very skilfully constructed out of wood and thin sheets of horn, the latter being white and pared down so finely that they were not less transparent than a vessel of glass. The door of the lantern, also, was made of horn, and shut so closely that no draught could possibly come through. In this place of safety, then, he placed his tapers: when they were burnt out their place was immediately supplied by others; and thus without a water-clock, or another instrument of a more artistic description, which was not yet invented, he succeeded in marking exactly the time which was so valuable to him.

As he was in the habit of having all kinds of ornaments made, of course he could not do without the assistance of goldsmiths;\* and a very remarkable specimen of their workmanship has been preserved up to the present day; we allude to the so-called “Alfred’s Jewel,” which is fashioned with great delicacy and art, and of which various drawings have, at different times, been made. It was found, in the year 1693, at Newton Park, in the lowlands of Somerset, on the banks of the little

\* Asser, p. 486, expressly names “aurifices.”



river Parret, somewhat to the north of the spot where the island and fort of Athelney were once situated.\* There, no doubt, the King had lost this mark of his dignity, during the most unhappy days of his life, and it had remained buried in the swamp until, after the lapse of so many centuries, it accidentally came to light. It is now preserved as a valuable monument of olden times in the Ashmolean Museum, at Oxford. This work of art consists of a thick and polished crystal, of an oval form, rather more than two inches in length, and half an inch thick; it is inlaid with a mosaic enamel, green and yellow, representing the outline of a human figure, which appears to be seated, and holds in each hand a kind of lily-stalk with flowers. This figure has been variously supposed to be intended for St. Cuthbert, St. Neot, and even Christ himself;—in our opinion, however, this rude outline is nothing more than the representation of a king in his robes of state. The back of the crystal is protected by a thin plate of fine gold, on which there is also a flower very tastefully and ingeniously let in. The oval-shaped side of the crystal is surrounded by a setting of gold filigree-work, of most excellent and durable workmanship, and has engraved on it the following remarkable words, which preclude all doubt as to the former possessor of the jewel:

ÆLFRED MEC HEHT GEWYRCAN.

Alfred caused me to be made.

The letters of this inscription are all capitals, and

\* Ackerman, "Archæological Index," p. 143. Plate XIX. 1.



are exactly similar in their somewhat stiffish form to the initial-letters which head the various chapters in the authentic manuscripts of Alfred’s time. But the genuine ancient form, in which the two middle words are written, may be regarded as a still more convincing guarantee than even the letters, for the antiquity claimed by the inscription. At the bottom of the jewel, where the crystal and its setting run together, the gold ends in a beautifully fashioned dolphin’s head of the same metal, whose empty eye-sockets once, no doubt, contained precious stones, and through whose open mouth there is a little gold peg. This probably served to fasten a stick or handsome wand, at the end of which the jewel was no doubt carried. By a strange freak of chance it is highly probable, that in this curious production of art we possess a portion of Alfred’s sceptre. The art employed in its manufacture impresses us with an extremely favourable idea of the skill and workmanship of those times.

We may fairly presume that many ornaments of this description were made, and Alfred himself, in his preface to the “Pastoral,” mentions an article of gold workmanship which had been executed in obedience to his orders. With each copy of the book he gave a gold tablet\* of the worth of fifty mancusses. It is not impossible that William of Malmesbury saw one of them.† At present that they are all lost it is impossible for us to deter-

\* “Æstel,” an index or tablet with columns, “pugillares,” *πίνακες*.

† “Gesta Reg.” II. § 123: “Cum pugillari aureo in quo est

mine how much they were worth, in weight and workmanship.

We possess money of Alfred's coinage in tolerable abundance, but its execution is far inferior to that of the money of other Anglo-Saxon princes. The King's portrait is invariably so roughly stamped, that all idea of forming from it any notion of his appearance is altogether out of the question. There is not the least doubt that Offa had employed Italian minters, otherwise it would have been impossible for his coinage to have attained the perfection which every one must allow it to possess. It was not until the reign of Alfred's grandson, Athelstan, that any degree of art was again employed in the coinage of money; it was during this period, too, that the coinage was made the subject of especial laws. It is also plain from the low standard \* of Alfred's money, that the necessities of the times prevented him from adopting any measures for its improvement, and that he was, probably, obliged to have recourse to the same expedient which Frederic the Great was also compelled to adopt. His laws contain nothing referring to the subject of the coinage, although we often find in them the designations of pounds, shillings, and pence. There were coins of the value of a shilling and a penny, and even of the third part † of the

manca auri." The relation of "manca," "mancusa," and "marca," to one another, has not yet been satisfactorily explained. Compare Du Cange, p. 5.

\* Ruding, "Annals of the Coinage," ed. III. vol. I. p. 125.

† "Legg. Ælfr." p. 71: "þriddan dæl pænninges."

latter. On the money we now possess the King is called simply *Ælfred*, *Ælfred rex*, or *Elfred M—X* ; *Dorovernia*, *Oxnaforda*, and *Londinia* are mentioned as places where there were mints.

Manuscripts formed a separate department of Middle-Age art. The reader will remember the book whose variegated letter so pleased the studious boy. The few manuscripts of Alfred's time that we now possess are all, however, very simple ; the handwriting is flowing, and, especially in the old copies of the *Pastoral*, exceedingly expressive. The initial letters of the chapters are generally ornamented, though not gorgeously. Dragons and bird-like monsters, as well as distorted human faces are drawn in black round the stem of the letter, and the red colour is afterwards thrown in as shade.

These remains and fragments are all we now possess, and by their aid we are enabled to form but an unsatisfactory idea of the state of the arts and sciences in England during the latter half of the ninth century. It is, however, easy to perceive, in spite of the poverty of our sources of information, that, as long as it was possible, Alfred was untiring in his endeavours to advance them, both by his own exertions, and all the means at his disposal. It was reserved for posterity to reap the benefit of his labours, which in this instance, too, reconquered the ground that had been lost, and which furnished the people with the most powerful resources against future calamities.

## SECTION VII.

RENEWED STRUGGLE AND CONFIRMATION OF EXISTING INSTITUTIONS. — THE KINGDOM IS TRANSMITTED, MORE POWERFUL THAN EVER, TO EDWARD I.

THE years of peace, which Alfred could not have employed better and more advantageously than in regulating all the various branches of legislation and political economy, and in elevating arts and literature, for the material and spiritual benefit of his subjects, were now fast drawing to a close. Much remained, however, to be done; some portion of this may have been carried out during the quieter years that followed, but the remainder must have been left, with little chance of successful realisation, for later governments to execute. The external relations of the West-Saxon kingdom began, once more, to predominate imperiously over its internal affairs, which, thanks to the unparalleled exertions of the King had begun to blossom into prosperity. Once again was Alfred compelled to repel the attacks of that seafaring foe, who was the terror of every regularly constituted state.

During the whole of the period that had elapsed since Alfred had been fortunate enough to secure the tranquillity of the island by force of arms,

there had, doubtlessly, been no want of harbingers to foretell the coming storm. Accounts of the deeds of the heathens, multitudes of whom still infested all the coasts of the opposite continent, continued to find their way to the Saxons, and to engross the King's attention. But the severe lesson, which, after the greatest exertions, he had succeeded in giving these rapacious hordes, appears to have been still fresh in their memory, and to have restrained them, for some time, at least, from again attempting to invade his dominions. Since the year 885, all regular hostilities with them had completely ceased; the kindred races, which only hated one another as long as they were separated by differences of faith, and by various degrees of civilization, had, by the conversion of a great number of Northmen in East-Anglia, and even in Northumbria, learnt to understand their common interest. It appeared as if the admission of the Danes into the system of the more civilised Anglo-Saxon states was destined to prove a firm bulwark against all future attacks of heathendom.

There was no occasion for fresh campaigns or battles, and the deep wounds inflicted by a long war upon the Saxon people, were gradually being healed. The importance of the kingdom had been greatly increased by its heroic King, who availed himself of this very circumstance to extend the limits of his dominions by peaceful means, and cause his supremacy to be acknowledged by those neighbouring states that had hitherto not been reduced to submission. At this period Alfred

succeeded in doing what no other king had ever been able to effect; he established a friendly intercourse with the British inhabitants of Wales, and made them feel their dependence on their more powerful western neighbour. During the long struggle with the Danes, the old national hatred of the Britons broke out as strong as ever, and it is very sure that their hostile feelings had contributed not a little to the misfortunes of the year 878. But they, also, learned to their cost, that the Danes, with whom they thought to make common cause, did not spare them either, but profited by their weakness when their affairs were in the most desperate state. In addition to this, there were always feuds and dissensions among the petty princes of their country, and it was natural that the weaker party should be the first to turn for assistance to foreign rulers, who had, in reality, long obtained the mastery over them.

It was about the time that Alfred became acquainted with Asser, that quarrels of this kind broke out in the country of the latter, whom alone we have to thank for all our information concerning them.\* Asser applied to the King of the Anglo-Saxons for protection for himself and his monastery at St. David's against the continual annoyances and acts of injustice on the part of Hemeid, Prince of Demetia, and he formally made Alfred's fulfilment of his request one of the conditions of his entering into the arrangement which the latter desired. But the opportunity turned

\* Asser, p. 488.

out advantageously for Alfred in his endeavours to place his authority on a firm basis among the Welsh. Hemeid being hard pressed by the six sons of Rotri Mawr (Roderic the Great), the princes of Venedotia or North Wales, was the first to submit with his petty principality of Demetia to Saxon supremacy. Helised, the son of Teudyr, and King of Brecknock, was unable to cope with these same opponents, and placed himself under Alfred's protection. Howel, the son of Ris, and Prince of Gleguising, in what is now the counties of Monmouthshire and Glamorgan-shire; Brechmail and Fermail, the sons of Mauric, and princes of Guent on the Severn, could not, with all their united efforts, withstand any longer Athelred, the strict ealdorman of the Mercians, who was determined to have peace upon the border, and made them feel his authority. They proceeded, therefore, of their own accord to the King and besought him to take them also under his protection. Finally, Anaraut, the son of Rotric, and his brothers, declared that they, too, were prepared to submit without being compelled to do so by force of arms. Before Anaraut came to this decision, however, he relinquished the alliance that he had long kept up with the Anglo-Danes in Northumbria, and which had been productive of naught but evil to him. He came in person to Alfred, who received him with every mark of respect befitting his rank, and adopting him from the hands of some bishop, probably Werefrith, as his spiritual son, made him rich presents,



and allowed him, with all his vassals and prerogatives, to enjoy the same feudal position towards Wessex which Athelred occupied in Mercia. We may with justice assert that, after the two parties had agreed to this arrangement, all the southwestern provinces of Britain acknowledged King Alfred's authority,\* nor did they ever again rise up against it, or afford any assistance to his Northern foes as long as he swayed the sceptre of Wessex.

The motives for the fresh attack which the Danes shortly afterwards directed against England, must be sought, first, in the unquiet nature of this people, and the serious reverses they had frequently experienced on the Frankish coast, and, secondly, in the events which had occurred in those districts of England that were inhabited by a mixed population. The year 890 was marked by the death of Guthorm-Athelstan,† King of East-Anglia, who, during the last years of his reign had been compelled, either by age or the force of circumstances, to lead a quieter life, and appears to have observed more faithfully than he had hitherto done the conditions of the treaty. He was buried at Thetford.‡ Our authorities are not clear concerning the succession to his throne.

\* Asser, p. 488: "Omnes regiones dexteralis Britanniae partis ad Ælfred regem pertinebant et adhuc pertinent." "Dexteralis," signifies southern, which, according to the ideas of that period, was really the position of the districts inhabited by the Britons.

† "Chron. Sax." A. 890. "Florent. Wigorn." I. p. 108.

‡ Gaimar, V. 3383, "Le cors de lui gist a Thuetfort;" but, according to the Annals of the Pseudo-Asser, it is in Headlaga.



This may be regarded as a sign that disturbances had taken place in his dominions, which obstructed their quiet development. After him a Northman of the name of Eohric is said to have assumed the reins of government, and it is not until under Edward I. that we find Guthorm's son or nephew, Guthorm II. Probably the heathen element had, after his death, once more burst forth in Suffolk and Norfolk. During the few last years subsequent to Healfden's death, Egbert, whom we have already mentioned, ruled over one part of Northumbria, and the Dane Guthred, over the other. The origin of the latter is obscure, but he is said to have been the son of the Danish King, Hardikanut.\* He was a Christian, however, and a great benefactor of the church at Durham. He had concluded a solemn peace with Alfred. This prince died on the 24th August, 894, and was buried in the Cathedral at York.† Under him, Alfred's influence in the country appears to have obtained the upper hand, and, after his death, it was in vain that the Danish element, which was represented by his three sons, endeavoured to oppose Alfred's authority. These and similar occurrences were, perhaps, in some way connected with the attacks which, during this time, were being planned from without.

The Northmen had not yet succeeded in establishing themselves on the coasts of the German and

\* Simeon Dunelm." "Gesta Reg. Angl." A. 883, ap. Twysden.

† Æthelweard, IV. p. 518, "In natalitia Sancti Bartholomæi." Compare Simeon Dunelm. "Gesta Angl." p. 685.

Frankish Carolingians, and founding settlements there. In spite of their want of resources, and the serious defeats they experienced, the inhabitants of those parts steadily continued the struggle and would never allow their wandering foes to enjoy a moment's repose. Whenever the latter endeavoured to settle anywhere, they were either scared away by some unexpected attack, or urged forward by their own restlessness, until they met with other opponents who defended their possessions with the same resolution. At last, the German King, Arnulf himself, who was yet destined to do honour to the race from which he was sprung, had, with a considerable army, composed of Franks, Saxons, and Bavarians, marched against the foe in the northern part of his dominions.\* He first suffered a defeat, which was followed by the brilliant victory on the Dyle, near Löwen, on the first day of September, in the year 891. Arnulf fell upon the Danes unexpectedly and defeated them completely before they could reach their ships. The battle was so decisive that the Danes never afterwards attempted to settle on German soil for any length of time.† But another large army, which was committing the most horrible ravages in the North-French dominions was not, for the moment, united with the Danes who had been conquered in Flanders, and, therefore, was not immediately affected by this battle. Hasting, who by this time must have been very old, was the dreaded leader of

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 891.

† "Annal. Fuld." A. 891, ap. Pertz. M. G. SS. I. p. 408.

this division. For a year previous, he had levied tribute in the neighbourhood of the Somme. He had now fixed his quarters at Amiens, and by sudden and unexpected attacks from that place endeavoured to plunder the rich religious houses of St. Vaast and St. Omer. He several times inflicted severe losses upon King Odo, who had marched to oppose him. In consequence of the incessant ravages that had been committed, a general famine now broke out, in the year 892, throughout the country; large bands of Danes who could find nothing more to plunder, and who were joined from the north by the remains of the army that had been defeated on the Dyle, met at Boulogne, and, taking their horses with them, embarked for England in a fleet of two hundred and fifty vessels.\* They landed, according to the Chronicle, at the mouth of the little river Limene (Lymne) in the eastern part of Kent, near the eastern extremity of the Andred-Wald, which was one hundred and fifty miles long, and thirty miles broad. They here availed themselves of an old Roman fortification which has very lately been dug up again,† and, tugging their vessels against

\* "Annal. Vedast." A. 892, ap. Pertz; "Monum." I. p. 528; "Chron. Sax." A. 893; but the Cambridge Manuscript had, originally, A. 892, which year is also meant by Æthelweard, IV. p. 518. Lappenberg, p. 342, n. 2, suspects, with Guido ap. Alberie, A. 895, that Björn Ironribs commanded this fleet.

† [Dr. Pauli has here fallen into an error; the Roman fortification recently excavated at Lymne (the *Portus Lemanis* of the Ancients), is altogether a different place from the river Lymne (the Rother) where the Danes landed, as described in the text, which is some miles farther west.—ED.]

the stream for a distance of four miles from the mouth of the river until they reached the boundary of the wood, found a fortress which had been erected by some Kentish peasants. This had not been completed, and, consequently, the efforts of the peasants to defend it were unavailing, and the Danish army fixed its quarters a little further on, near Appledore. Not long afterwards, in the year 893, another fleet of eighty vessels arrived in the mouth of the Thames, conducted by Hasting himself, who, no doubt, was the instigator of the whole enterprise, and who had left the French coast which was completely exhausted, in hopes of finding in England more plunder, and perhaps a kingdom, like others of his countryman. He proceeded up the Swale, and, like those who had preceded him, landed in Kent, near Milton, where he erected fortifications.\*

The two armies remained quietly in these positions until about the end of the following winter. About Easter, 894 (31st March), the Danes proceeded from Appledore, and, protected by the woods and marshes, penetrated into the neighbouring districts, and ravaged the country as far as Hampshire and Berkshire.† The fickle-minded population of East-Anglia and Northumbria, a portion of whom were still heathens themselves, and who had only a short time previously renewed their oath of allegiance to King Alfred, the Northumbrians having actually given him six hostages for its due maintenance, acted in perfect concert with the large

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 893; Æthelw. IV. p. 518.

† Æthelw. IV. p. 518.

hordes of the new-comers, for, as often as the latter left Appledore or Milton on a plundering expedition, the East-Anglians and Northumbrians made incursions into the neighbouring territories of Wessex or Mercia.

The moment was now arrived for Alfred once more to grasp the sword, after having long consigned it to repose, in order to wield the weapons of the mind, during the days of peace and leisure. Bitter experience had rendered him well acquainted with the cunning and versatility of his foes. How often had he found that the Danes could offer no opposition to fair and honourable valour, but, escaping by stratagem from the heat of the fight, would yet carry off the victory, thanks to some measure of well-conceived treachery! He determined, therefore, to profit by the knowledge for which he had paid so dearly, and to use the greatest caution as well as similar stratagems in carrying out his plans. As long as the Danes remained within their fortified camps, he did not attack them, for the localities they had selected were rendered inaccessible by forest and morass, but every thing was prepared to give them a bloody reception upon more favourable ground. During the time of peace, too, Alfred had adopted measures for the military defence of the country, having divided the whole population capable of bearing arms into two halves, one of which remained at home, engaged in agriculture and trade, while the other was in the field ready to oppose the enemy. After the lapse of a stated period, the division in the field was relieved

and the other immediately took its place. There was a separate body especially entrusted with the task of garrisoning the fortified places throughout the country, and this body was always under arms,\* though there is no doubt that Alfred had also caused every one to be constantly trained in the use of his weapon. Some of his army had already seen service. Immediately after the arrival of the Northmen, he appears to have stationed, on the south-eastern boundaries of his kingdom, a small body of observation, under the command of his youthful son, Edward, the heir-apparent, who obtained intelligence of every movement of the enemy.† The Ealdorman Athelred had also called out all his forces, and, likewise, garrisoned the newly-fortified town of London, which was under his authority. On Edward's announcing that the heathens had passed him, without his having been in a condition to prevent their doing so, Alfred set himself in motion with the whole mass of his army, and took up his position between the two hostile divisions, and as near to them as the woods and morasses on both sides would allow. His object in this was to be enabled to come up with either division, the moment it ventured into the open field. He could not have chosen a more advantageous position, as his great object was not only to keep the two Danish

\* "Hæfde se cyning his fierd on tu tōnumen. Swa pæt hie wæron simle healfe at hām. Healfe ūte. Būtan pæm monnum þe þa burga healdan scolden." "Chron. Sax." A. 894.

† It is thus that we must understand Æthelweard, IV. p. 518, "prænotata sunt hæc clitoni tum Eaduuerti Elfredi filii regis," etc.

armies apart from one another, but to cut off all communication between them and the eastern coast which was favourable to their interests. It appears that these measures induced Hasting to promise that he would speedily quit the country, and that he sent his own sons as hostages to the Saxon King. The latter, however, sent them back again to their father, after having first caused them to be baptized, he and his son-in-law, Athelred, acting as god-fathers.\*

With a view of plundering, the Danes endeavoured to get off in small bodies along the skirts of the wood, but the King despatched similar small bands, partly from his own troops, partly from those which composed the garrisons of the fortified towns, to oppose them, so that there were almost continual conflicts and skirmishes by day and night. On two occasions only did the Danes venture to take the field with all their forces; the first was immediately after their landing, before the Saxons had marched out to oppose them, and the second, most probably, when the division which had penetrated into the distant districts of Hampshire and Berkshire was returning laden with plunder. They now manifested the intention of crossing the Thames, in order to reach Essex, whither their ships had already sailed.

\* This, according to Lappenberg, p. 343, is the meaning of "Chron. Sax." p. 894: "Hæfdon hi hiora onfangen ær Hæsten to Beamfleote cōme," and of Æthelweard, IV. p. 518: "Obsecrant pacis barbari jamque fœderisque statum: obsides dantur; adfirmant jure exire regno præfati regis: actus et sermo simul una complentur."



Hereupon, Alfred immediately put his army in motion, and cut off their passage. Near Farnham, in Surrey, he compelled them to accept the combat, and, after entirely defeating them, captured all their booty. In this battle the Atheling Edward distinguished himself very highly, through his courageous bearing, while, on the other side, the heathen king (Björn?) fled wounded from the field. His army precipitated itself in the wildest disorder towards the north, and, without even waiting to find a ford, crossed the Thames, probably between Hampton and Kingston. It then directed its course towards Essex, but the fugitives did not join their ranks again before they had reached the island of Thorney, which is situated at the mouth of the Colne, and whither their ships had already preceded them.

Alfred ordered a part of his army to follow them immediately. For some time the Saxons kept the Danish ships locked in, but their provisions were soon exhausted, the period of service of the division in the field had expired, and they possessed, most probably, no ships to enable them to come near the Danes by sea. The troops who had commenced the investment of the vessels abandoned it, and returned to their homes, and Alfred, with the detachment destined to relieve them, was just coming up to hold the conquered foe in check previous to destroying them altogether, when he received information of a sudden attack made by the faithless Northumbrians and East-Anglians on the western coast of his kingdom. As their allies, the Danes,



had not, in so short a space, recovered from the serious defeat they had suffered at Farnham, and were, besides, unable to drag their king about with them, as he was desperately wounded, the invaders had collected some hundred ships, the greater portion of which sailed along the south coast and threatened to take possession of Exeter, while another fleet of forty vessels proceeded up towards the Bristol Channel, and commenced the siege of a fortified town on the northern coast of Devonshire. The attack was cunningly devised, as those parts of the kingdom were, for the moment, stript of all their forces. When this intelligence was brought to Alfred, he determined on retracing his steps with the greater portion of the troops he had with him, in order to take measures for the defence of his western provinces, and prevent the enemy from anywhere establishing themselves.\*

But while Alfred himself conducted the execution of these measures the contest was continued by others in the east. For this purpose, he had left behind him a strong detachment which marched towards London, and was reinforced by the garrison† of that place, as well as by the other bodies of troops which had hurried up from the west. It was unquestionably under the command of the Ealdorman Athelred, whose duty it was to defend the eastern boundaries of the kingdom, that this de-

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 894.

† [It is not perhaps quite correct to use the word garrison—the soldiers in the towns were not such as in modern times constitute a garrison, but the armed burghers and citizens.—ED.]

tachment penetrated to before Benfleet, in Essex. It was thither that Hasting had marched with his followers shortly after the battle of Farnham, and again occupied the fortifications which he had thrown up there in the year 885. He had been joined, also, by the large body of troops, which had first taken up their quarters at Appledore, and subsequently been driven back as far as the mouth of the Colne. This body garrisoned the place, during the absence of Hasting, who was engaged in a predatory excursion, when the Saxons appeared with all their forces before the walls. The opposition offered by the Danes was easily overcome. The Saxons stormed the fortress and obtained possession of the property that was there, together with all the women and children: they then returned, laden with spoil, to London. Some of the ships which they found on the beach before Benfleet were broken up or burnt, while the remainder were taken to London or Rochester.

Among the prisoners were Hasting's wife and two sons, who were sent to King Alfred. Instead of revenging himself on them, however, he again gave proof of his generosity and Christian virtue by sending them back, laden with rich presents, to their faithless father, as he had done once before. Hasting, however, who had broken his oath towards the godfathers of his children, was not yet reformed or converted. Even after his fortress had been wrested from him, and he had experienced the kindest treatment from Alfred and Athelred, he still continued to ravage the possessions of his be-

nefactors, in the most frightful manner.\* He knew that his brave opponent was busied far away in the west, and, profiting by this, effected in a short space of time a fresh junction of the various hordes dispersed about Essex, and of the reinforcements that had joined them from the Anglian and Northumbrian coast. He then entrenched himself in a fortified camp at Shoebury, a place somewhat to the east of Benfleet. Soon afterwards, feeling himself strong enough to march with his whole army against Mercia, he forced his way up the left bank of the Thames, and proceeded right across the country, until he reached the Severn, with the intention of following its course towards the south.

But Athelred did not remain a quiet spectator of his proceedings. He immediately assembled all his available forces, while Athelhelm, the Ealdorman of the Wiltsætas, Ealdorman Athelnoth and the royal thanes, who had hitherto garrisoned the various fortified towns, joined him with their respective followers. Every place east of the Parret, and east and west of the Willow Wood, contributed a certain number of men, as did also the districts to the north of the Thames, and to the west of the Severn. Even the inhabitants of North Wales were obliged to furnish their contingents. With these numerous levies, Athelred marched against the enemy, whom he found at Buttington, on the banks of the

\* “And eft oðre siðc he wæs on hergað gelend on pæt ilce rice. þa þa man his geweorc abræc.” “Chron. Sax.” A. 894, where the two occasions of his sons’ captivity are abridged into one.

Severn, entrenched behind their fortifications. He immediately surrounded them completely on both sides of the river, and, for several weeks, defeated every attempt on their part to force a passage.\* In consequence of all their supplies of provisions being cut off, a frightful famine broke out among the besieged. They had already eaten a great number of their horses, and many of them had died of starvation, when Hasting saw himself compelled to venture on making a sally towards the east. A desperate conflict ensued ; several royal thanes, and among them one of the name of Ordheh, were slain, but the Christians proved victorious, and obliged the Northmen to fly in the wildest disorder.†

If we can believe the exceedingly obscure account given by Athelweard, it would appear that Hasting concluded a treaty by which he engaged to evacuate Mercia. It is clear, however, that he was under the necessity of doing so without delay, and the victors seem to have offered no opposition. He now regained his stronghold in Essex, where, before the winter set in,‡ he hastily formed a large army out of the scattered survivors among his own countrymen, and fresh bands of East-Anglians and Northumbrians. Confiding their wives and ships, together with all their property, to the care of the

\* “ðā hie þa fela wucena sæton on twa healfe pære ê.”  
“Chron. Sax.” A. 894.

† “Gesta hæc quippe in Buttingtune prædicantur a priscis,” says Æthelweard, in words to be understood as applying to songs which were doubtlessly sung in his time in celebration of the battle.

‡ “Onforan winter.”

East-Anglians, they once more proceeded by forced marches, night and day, towards the north-west. It seems as if the sea-king was particularly anxious to effect a passage to the west coast; he was desirous, possibly, of coming to the assistance of the large fleet, which was hard pressed by Alfred on the coast of Devonshire. Athelred, according to the custom of the time, had dismissed the Mercian levies to their homes immediately after the victory at Buttington, and Hasting having consequently met with no opposition on his march, arrived before Chester, which was situated at the extremity of the peninsula of Wirral.\* He did not succeed in surprising the garrison, however, who had retired within the walls, and the Danes contented themselves with besieging the place two days, putting to death the few persons they found outside, and driving off all the cattle from their pasturage. The corn which fell into their hands, was either burnt, or consumed by themselves and their horses.†

Hasting passed the winter in Wirral, and in the spring of the year 895, made preparations for marching to North Wales, as all the corn and cattle had either been eaten up by his followers, or taken away from him again.‡ In Wales they penetrated as far as the south, ravaging, in particular, Gwent, Brecknock, and some other of the neighbouring

\* "On anre westre ceastre on Wirhealum. Seo is Legaceaster gehâten." "Chron. Sax." A. 894.

† "On ælcere efenehðe," each time in the evening, if the expression is correct.

‡ "Chron. Sax." A. 895.

districts.\* They then turned back with the plunder they had obtained, and directed their course towards the north, proceeding inland through Northumbria and East-Anglia, in order that the Mercian levies which had been called out might not overtake them. It is probable that they took York in their way, and then continued their march in a southerly direction, through the Mercian territory, and also that an engagement must have taken place near Stamford on the Welland, in Northamptonshire, between Hasting and the Ealdorman Athelnoth, who had marched up from the west.† The main body of the heathens, however, reached Essex again, and established themselves upon the island of Mersey.

At the same time that Hasting marched towards Wales, a Viking, of the name of Sigferth, had set sail with his fleet from Northumbria, and had laid waste and plundered portions of the coast, and returned laden with booty.‡

\* “*Annales Cambriæ*,” A. 895. “*Nordmanni venerunt et vastaverunt Loyer et Brecheniauc et Guent et Guinliguiau;*” also Morganwg and Buallt, “*Brut y Tywysogion*,” A. 894, in “*Mon. Hist. Brit.*”

† So I infer from the suspected passage in *Æthelweard*, out of which Lappenberg was not quite correct in deriving his information for the following year, as only two years had elapsed since the landing of the Danes. This passage, which defies all efforts at correction, runs thus: “*Ab occidentali profectus est parte tunc Anglorum Æthelnoth dux; adit in hoste Evoraca urbe, qui non parva territoria pandunt in Myrciorum regno loci in parte occidentali Stanforda, hoc est inter fluentia amnis Uueolod et condenso sylvæ quæ vulgo Ceoftefne (l. Ceostefne) nuncupatur.*”

‡ *Æthelweard*, p. 518. We do not learn whither the expedition was directed. According to the “*Annals of Ulster*,” p. 65, Ingvar’s son, Sigferth, had killed his brother, Guthferth.

Meanwhile, Alfred had kept the field with his forces a whole year, though nothing decisive appears to have taken place in this part of the kingdom. At any rate, he effected one great object, which was, to prevent the Danes from ravaging the old West-Saxon districts that formed the heart of his kingdom; he also finally compelled the large fleet, whose crews had in vain besieged Exeter, to put to sea again, and sail home. On their way thither, the Danes and East-Angles made a sudden descent upon the coast of Sussex, not far from Chichester, but the inhabitants of this place attacked and put them to flight, after killing several hundred of them and capturing some of their ships. The survivors escaped to their comrades on the island of Mersey.\*

Before the conclusion of the winter, the Danish camp at this place was again in motion; the ships were launched, and towed as far as the Thames, which river they entered, and then proceeded up the Lea. The winter was passed in erecting a fortress, about four German miles to the north of London, and consequently somewhere in the neighbourhood of Hertford or Ware. When the summer of the year 896 had arrived, a large body of troops from the garrison of London, being joined by a number of other persons, marched against the fortress, but they were driven back by the Danes, after losing four royal thanes. About harvest-time, Alfred encamped with his troops in the neighbourhood of London, in order that the people might house the harvest without being molested by the

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 895.



Danes. One day, the King rode along the banks of the little river Lea, and discovered a spot where the bed of the river might very easily be filled up and the water drawn off, so that the enemy would no longer be able to float their ships. He commenced the execution of his design by throwing up two earthen ramparts on each side of the Lea.\* His followers had encamped on the spot, and were busily employed at the works, when the Danes remarked that the water was sinking, and that there would be no possibility of their extricating their vessels. They therefore abandoned them, and having first confided their wives to the guardianship of the East-Angles, they hastily directed their course towards the north, marching again through the heart of the country to the Severn, where they entrenched themselves near Bridgenorth,† in Shropshire. While Alfred despatched part of his army to follow them at some little distance behind, the men of London took possession of the deserted fleet. All the ships that were not worth anything were destroyed, but the good ones‡ were taken to London.

In the summer of the following year, the large army of the Northmen left the Severn, and divided

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 896; Barrington, "Ælfr. Oros." Translations, p. 60, entertains the not improbable opinion that Alfred may have hit upon the idea of draining the Lea, by remembering how Cyrus had done the same thing in the case of the Euphrates, a fact of which Alfred had read in Orosius.

† "Æt Cwatbricge be Sæfern."

‡ "þe þær stælwyrðe wæron," worthy of being stolen, taken away.



itself into three parties, one of which returned to East-Anglia, while another directed its course towards Northumbria. The third party, which was entirely in want of the most necessary articles, succeeded in obtaining vessels, and, crossing the sea in a southerly direction, under the guidance of Hasting, arrived at the mouth of the Seine.\* Here the old pirate found means to compel the king, Charles the Simple, to cede him a tract of land in the province of Chartres where, as is reported, he was quietly settled, when Rollo obtained possession of Normandy, fifteen years later.†

Thus, after three years of manful resistance, was the kingdom of the West-Saxons once more freed from the pernicious foe who, after having attempted to force their way into the country on all sides, both by sea and land, had at last been compelled to abandon their designs and to depart as poor as they had come. "Thanks be to God," writes the old Saxon Chronicler, "the heathens had not this time, reduced the English people to quite such a state of degradation,"‡ and from our knowledge of Alfred's disposition, we are certainly justified in concluding that both he and his whole people celebrated the happy event with solemn thanksgivings in the temples of their God which they had defended and restored to the best of their power.

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 897, and "Asserii Annales," ad A. 895.

† W. Gemet. ap. Du Chesne, "Scriptt. Rer. Norm." pp. 221, 228.

‡ "Næfle se here. Godes þonces. Angel-cyn calles for swiðe gebrocod." "Chron. Sax." A. 896.

But there was another calamity by which the Saxons sustained even more heavy losses than they had done in the field. This was the malady which raged both among men and beasts in consequence of the ravages and other calamities of war. Even the highest classes of the population were not spared, and among others of the most important dignitaries and officers of state who died at this period were the Bishops Swithulf of Rochester and Ealheard of Dorchester; the Ealdormen Ceolmund of Kent, Beorhtulf of Essex, and Wulfred of Hampshire; the Thane Eadulf; Beornwulf, Port-reeve of Winchester, and Ecgulf, the King's Master of the Horse, who may all be reckoned among the principal supporters of the prosperity and security of the country.

But, in spite of their being compelled, once again and for the last time in Alfred's lifetime, to take up arms in their defence, neither the people nor their king allowed their courage to sink. The hostile hordes, which had proceeded from Bridgenorth to Northumbria and East-Anglia, and which were composed of the faithless inhabitants of those districts, together with a number of homeless Danes, ventured once more to make an attack upon the West-Saxon territory, and, relying principally on their light vessels, which they had constructed a long time previous with a view to enterprises of this description,\* endeavoured to effect a descent upon the southern coast, which, up to that time, they had plundered but little. Alfred, however,

\* "Ealra swiðost mid þæm æscum þe hie fela geara ær timbredon." "Chron. Sax." A. 897.

had learnt the expediency of always meeting the enemy with their own weapons, a plan which he had already carried out with the greatest success, and he, therefore, now resolved to attack them by sea with all the forces he could command. Hitherto he had had so many other things to occupy his attention that it must have been impossible for him to fit out a fleet, although a great number of vessels had, on several different occasions, been captured by his followers, during the course of the preceding years, and now lay in the ports of London and Rochester. He might certainly have availed himself of these to execute his project, but the Danish ships were small and frail, and the Saxons, too, were not yet accounted such fearless and daring seamen as the Danes.

Alfred's imaginative and persevering mind endeavoured to remedy this evil by building ships nearly twice as long as those of the Scandinavians,\* and generally impelled by sixty or even more rowers. By doing this, he rendered his vessels stronger, higher, and, at the same time, swifter. Such was the object which he had in view, and which was not suggested by anything he had seen among the Frisians or Danes. What he produced bore the stamp of nationality and furnished his country with a defensive force which, in later ages, has become the pride of England and the ruler of the world. Thus, even in the British Navy,

\* These vessels, which were called "snekkar" (snakes), generally had only twenty rowers. Sir Harris Nicholas, "History of the Royal Navy," I. p. 10.

Alfred appears to have introduced improvements. In order to man this new fleet, besides employing his own seamen who were used to the English coasts, he had recourse to the assistance of Frisian sailors, who not only lived, at that period, in the most friendly commercial relations with the opposite island, but were engaged in continual struggles with the same foe, and must have acquired great experience in nautical warfare. The Frisians and Saxons, both Low Germans and Christians, agreed admirably, and endeavoured by their unanimity to repel the aggressions of heathendom.

As the Danes had now begun infesting the coast, after their usual manner, Alfred resolved to chastise them with his new fleet. Six of the enemy's vessels had taken up their station in the Isle of Wight, whence they kept the opposite coast as far as Devonshire, in a constant state of alarm through their sudden descents.\* They had, one day, just run into one of the bays of those parts, when nine of Alfred's ships appeared at its mouth, and cut them off from the sea. The Danes rowed to attack the new comers with three of their vessels, leaving the others somewhat farther up the stream on dry ground, as the tide had begun to run down, and the rapacious crews had gone on shore. Six of the Saxon ships immediately attacked them, taking possession of two out of the three and killing their crews. The third escaped, after having lost all its men with the exception of five. But in the heat of the combat, the Saxons had paid no atten-

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 897.

tion to the shallowness of the channel, and the consequence was that three of their vessels, which, before the engagement commenced, had directed their course against the Danish ships that were stranded, also ran-aground on the same side of the entrance, while the rest got on shore on the opposite bank. In this manner the Danish ship was enabled to get clear off, as we have already mentioned, but the Saxons were divided into two parties, each of which was completely cut off from all communication with the other. Meanwhile, the Danes who were on shore had received intelligence of what was going on, and, as the sea had receded so far that all the ships on their side of the water were left at a considerable distance from it, high and dry,\* they rushed forward with the fury of despair and attacked the Saxons. There now took place upon the shore a desperate combat, in which a hundred and twenty of the Danes were slain, while the Saxons lost Alfred's Earl, Lucumon, his friend Athelferth, the Frisian mariners, Wulfheard, Abbe, and Athelhere, with sixty-two other brave men. The Saxons whose ships had run aground on the opposite side of the water, and who could not hasten to the assistance of their comrades, were almost reduced to despair on being compelled to be the passive witnesses of such a misfortune.†

\* "pæt wæter wæs ahebbob fela furlanga from þæm scipum."

† Henric. Huntingd. V. p. 741, derives his information from the Chronicle, but infuses into his description a greater amount of poetical force: "Videres autem gentem sex navium bellum aspicientem, et auxilium ferre nequientem, pugnis cædere pectus, et unguibus rumpere crines."

Already did the balance of victory seem to incline to the side of the Danes, when the latter perceived that their ships had floated sooner than those of their opponents; hastily making their way on board, they seized their oars and put out to sea. By the time that the nine large Saxon vessels were got off, and able to follow them, the Danes had obtained such a start that all ideas of coming up with them were quite out of the question. The pirates' ships, however, were so shattered that they were not able to get round the dangerous coast of Sussex; two of them were cast ashore and their crews taken prisoners by the inhabitants and conveyed to Winchester. Alfred, who happened to be there, had them all hanged. One single vessel succeeded in reaching East-Anglia in a very wretched condition. During this same summer, twenty other Danish ships ran aground on the south coast, and went down with every soul on board.\*

These were the last acts of hostility which our authorities mention during Alfred's reign. His attempt to beat the foe by sea as well as by land, was by no means a very successful one; the combat had been attended with great loss to his followers, and his large ships had got into a place for which they were certainly not intended. The Saxons were far from being equal to their opponents in daring and skill, as far as nautical matters were concerned. But they were not, at any rate, afraid of measuring their strength with them, and, with their new fleet, succeeded for some years afterwards, in

\* "Mid monnum mid ealle." "Chron. Sax." A. 897.

defending the coast from all hostile attacks. In the British portion of the island, too, the Danes were utterly exhausted, and held in check by Alfred's vigilance.

Of the last four years of the King's life posterity knows scarcely anything. After peace has been concluded, our old authority has nothing more important to chronicle than the deaths of certain eminent persons, such as Marshall Wulfrie, the valiant Ealdorman Athelhelm, and Heahstan, Bishop of London.\* But to judge from all that has been handed down to us concerning Alfred's varied sphere of action, and which we have circumstantially detailed, we are justified in filling up this gap with the supposition that the King still continued to devote himself to his own improvement and that of those committed to his charge, whenever the cares of state and his weakly bodily health would allow. The prosperity of his dominions was further protected by a just administration of his laws, the instruction of the whole rising generation flourished under his own eye, and his leisure hours, which he snatched from his manifold occupations, were devoted, as they always had been, to study and literary labours. These he had doubtlessly resumed, in conjunction with his learned companions, as soon as the danger had passed, and, perhaps, much that had formerly been discussed was now carried into execution.

But the infirmities of a body bowed down during the best years of life by a malignant disease, to-

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 897, 898.



gether with the privations which it had suffered, and the effects of the inclemency of the weather to which it had been exposed had, probably, caused the King to become old before his time. His constitution, which had enabled him to achieve such great things, was broken up, and he died on the 28th October, 901, at the early age of fifty-three, after having reigned thirty years and six months.\* No one has left us a particular account of the manner of his death. He died, however, as he had lived, blessed in the consciousness of having performed his duty to the utmost of his power. His body was buried at Winchester, where he had probably breathed his last, and which, in the last few years, had sprung up to be the capital of the kingdom. He was laid in the monastery which he had founded, where his father and most of his forefathers also reposed. According to a later account, as the new Monastery of the Virgin was not yet completed, Alfred was

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 901: "Syx nihtum ær ealra haligra mæssan," that is, the 26th October; but, instead of "syx," we must, there is no doubt, read "feower," which, in figures, could easily be miswritten: for, in the "Anglo-Saxon Calendar," the 28th is mentioned as the day of the "Depositio Ælfredi Regis," and Florent. Wigorn. I. p. 116, names particularly: "Quarta feria, V. Kal. Novembris." The Chronicle, too, wrongly makes the duration of his reign only twenty-eight years and a half, when we know that he began to reign on the 23rd April, 871. Compare p. 138. Florence says, more correctly: "XXIX. annis sexque mensibus regni sui peractis." Simeon Dunelm. "Gesta Reg. Angl." on the contrary, 899, makes him die after a reign of twenty-eight years, but, in his other work, mentions the correct "Indictio IV"



provisionally buried in the bishop's cathedral, where the graves to which we alluded were situated; but the canons, excited by the credulity of their nation, and urged on by inimical feelings towards the monastic community, having asserted that they had seen the spirit of the great King wandering about during the night, his son commanded that the coffin should be laid in the neighbouring monastery that was nearly finished.\* Under Henry I. Alfred's remains were transported to Hyde Abbey, situated before the northern gate at Winchester, where they remained until the Reformation, and the breaking up of the establishment.†

The country was in the happy enjoyment of peace when it was struck with grief at the death of its deliverer. He had succeeded in retaining the whole English nation under his sceptre, with the exception of the eastern coast, where the Danes had firmly established themselves before his accession, but even they were dependent on him, and Wales obeyed without opposition. His eldest son Edward, in conformity with his father's directions and the custom that had now attained the force of law, immediately entered on the possession of his inheritance, under more happy auspices than Alfred, who had mounted the throne when the enemy had established themselves in the country, from which they were not driven out before the

\* W. Malmesb. II. § 124. Compare "Florent. Wigorn." I. p. 116: "in novo monasterio."

† Townshend, "Winchester," p. 17, in Turner, "History of the Anglo-Saxons," IV. p. 11.

expiration of many years of war. Edward had reached man's estate, his father had had him educated with a view to his kingly office, and he had already shown that he was worthy of it. We know that he took a share in the government as early as the year 898.\* During his reign he always justified the confidence his father placed in him, and soon gained that of his people as well.

In the very first years of his sway, he had an opportunity of showing of what he was capable. His cousin Athelwald, the second son of King Athelred, who was still a child on Alfred's accession, and who was excluded from the throne by his father's express command,† endeavoured to make good his pretensions. He was conscious that the Crown ought, in the direct line of succession, to have descended to him, a fact, however, which had not then been recognised as constituting a just claim in any empire of the Christian world. Without the consent of him who was acknowledged by the whole nation as Alfred's lawful successor, and without the approbation of the Witan, he obtained forcible possession of two royal domains. With the assistance of a band of daring adventurers, he endeavoured to make good his claims, but he found no adherents among the Saxon people. Besides this, he was, in the eyes of his contemporaries, guilty of a great crime, having, without the King's or the bishop's permission, married a young maiden who had taken the vows as

\* Kemble, "Cod. Diplom." N. 324, "Gift of Donation of the year 898."

† Compare p. 140.

a nun. Edward marched against him with his levies, and encamped in the neighbourhood of Wimburne. On hearing this, the Atheling, who had retired within the castle, swore that he would live or die there, but he stole out secretly during the night, and escaped to the Danes in Northumbria. With their help alone, united to that of the foes of his native country, did he now think to maintain his pretensions. The Danes acknowledged him as their leader, and yielded obedience to his commands.\*

After the true piratical fashion, he ravaged Edward's dominions on several occasions, but it was not before the year 905, that, with a large army under the command of Eohric, King of East-Anglia, he ventured upon invading the Mercian provinces. He reached the Thames, near Cricklade, and having crossed it, intended to take an eastward course, and carry home his booty through his cousin's dominions. But the latter at last attacked him on the banks of the Ouse. Unfortunately, the King, in spite of all his commands, had not been able to prevail on the Kentish levies to turn back, as they held their time of service to be expired, and had set out to return home. But they paid for their separation by a defeat which they suffered from the Danes. The latter, however, were immediately afterwards totally overcome by Edward, and, among many others of their leaders, King Eohric and the Atheling Athelwald were slain.†

This victory was far from being an unimportant one. The Pretender himself, who had thrown him-

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 901.

† "Chron. Sax." A. 905.

self into the arms of the Heathens after having been rejected by the entire Christian population, was slain, and his allies were severely chastised. Soon after this, Edward compelled the Danes of East-Anglia and Northumbria to conclude the peace of Yttingaford,\* on which occasion he made those stipulations with the new prince, Guthorm II., which we have already adduced as confirming Alfred's treaty of Wedmor.

But even this peace was insufficient to protect the country from fresh attacks. In connection with events in France, especially the conquest of Normandy, by Rollo, the Danes, also, of the eastern coast, who had been converted to Christianity, again engaged in hostilities, particularly during the years 911 and 918, and repeatedly attacked the country, both by sea and by land; but they were always repulsed with great loss, by Athelred of Mercia, and King Edward. The latter, energetic and courageous like his father, was always successful, while his people grew in strength under his government, and marched resolutely against the foe, as soon as the latter showed themselves. The spirit of Alfred was actively at work in the hearts both of the King and of his subjects, and now, at last, completed the work for which he had formerly laid the foundations, amidst danger and distress. Not only did Edward put the country in a more perfect state of defence, by the erection or restoration of a larger number of fortified strongholds, but he also founded various places that were destined to increase very greatly

\* "Chron. Sax." A. 906.

the national prosperity. As proofs of his activity in both cases, we find in our authorities such names as Chester, Hertford, Stafford, Tamworth, Warwick, and many others. Towns like Towcester were then, for the first time, surrounded by stone walls; and, it is enacted, in Edward's laws, that all commerce and trade shall be carried on in fortified places alone.\* Like a cautious prince, he directed his endeavours towards placing his subjects and their property beyond the reach of the destructive attacks of their treacherous foes.

Besides protecting, he also extended his dominions, for, on the death of his brother-in-law, Athelred, in 912, London and Oxford fell under the immediate authority of Wessex, and Edward joyfully entered on the permanent and absolute possession of the two places just mentioned. The rest of Mercia remained under the sway of his sister, Athelfled, who governed it like a true daughter of Alfred. In conjunction with her brother, she founded fortified towns, took the field in person, and, among other things, totally defeated the Welsh prince, Owen, who had risen in insurrection, and concluded an alliance with the Danes. Assisted by this courageous woman, the King succeeded in defining the eastern limits of his kingdom

\* Legg. Eadweardi, "Laws and Institutes," I. p. 158. [We must always take, with great allowance, the statements of the medieval chroniclers and historians with respect to building and fortifying towns, which, generally, in these times amounted only to repairing or adding defences to older fortifications. Towcester was a Roman station, and we know that Chester was fortified with massive Roman walls.—ED.]

much more distinctly, and in extending them against the Danes. This was particularly the case in Derby, Leicester, Huntingdon, and also in Essex, where the castle of Witham was built by the inhabitants of Maldon. On the other side of the border, the Danes of Northumbria and East-Anglia again acknowledged the supremacy of the West-Saxons. The authority of Wessex extended as far as Strathclyde, the Celtic kingdom in the south of Scotland.

On the death of that remarkable and active woman, Athelfled, which happened on the 12th of June, 919,\* Edward took possession of the kingdom of Mercia, that had hitherto been governed by her, and paid no attention to the claims of Alfwyn, his sister's only daughter, whom he sent to Wessex. This was wisely done, for it was impossible to allow the outer province of the kingdom to be inherited by a female, who might, by marriage, contract an alliance with the foe.

King Edward died at Farndon, in the year 924, at the height of his glory, which, as far as kingly power was concerned, surpassed that of his father, but with regard to nobleness of soul, and delicate culture of the mind, had not endeavoured to imitate it.† Athelstan inherited the power as well as the glory of both of them. After burying his father in the new monastery at Winchester, he was acknowledged king by all the states of his kingdom, and solemnly crowned in the royal castle at Kingston.

\* "Florent. Wigorn." I. p. 128.

† "W. Malmesb." II. § 125: "Literarum scientia multum patre inferior, sed regni potestate incomparabiliter gloriosior."

In the contest with the old foes of his country, he won for himself the name of a victorious hero. York fell before his arms, and, in the battle of Brunanburh, so extolled and celebrated both by historians and poets, the grandson of Alfred obtained a most triumphant victory over the united forces of the Northmen and of Celtic Scotland, and his deeds, like those of his grandfather, lived in verse long after he himself was dead. Feared and respected abroad, he even entered into friendly relations with the rulers of Norway, and in his communications with many other states of the Continent, created a system of foreign policy, whose two most firm supports were the rapidly increasing commerce and the unexampled degree of prosperity which England enjoyed. At the time of his death, which took place on the 27th October, 940, the Anglo-Saxon empire had reached the summit of its glory, from which it was, for two centuries following, pulled down only by the powerful rulers of the North, the weakness of the enervated descendants of the race of Cerdic, and the pretensions of a proud clergy, no longer restrained within due bounds.

## SECTION VIII.

## ALFRED IN HIS FAMILY AND AS A MAN.

THAT the next descendants of the great King did honour to his name, is proved by the history of Edward and Athelstan; they were descended from a race of heroes, and like kings and heroes did they follow in the footsteps of their fathers. But, besides his successor on the throne, Alfred beheld a numerous progeny, of whom, fortunately, all the accounts have not been lost, grow up around him. With reference to this point, it does not appear an unprofitable task to consider the conscientious care manifested by Alfred as the father of his children, and the sovereign of his people; nor, finally, to cast one more glance upon his moral greatness in all its various relations.

It is certainly true that the authorities in which the historian has to seek his information are, from their incompleteness, very far from satisfying the demands he makes upon them; but he must, however, gratefully acknowledge that at least in one document, known as Alfred's Will, a vast amount of valuable information has been preserved concerning the state of the King's family. This document is based upon King Athelwulf's will, which is unfortunately lost, and on the arrangements made by



Alfred when heir-apparent with his brother, Athelred, at Swinbeorh,\* by which arrangements the succession was vested in him, to the exclusion of the elder branch; but, at the same time, the private property equitably divided. Towards the year 885,† a Witenagemot was held at Langandene; Alfred laid his father's will before it, and the assembly acknowledged that since the kingdom and the principal portion of the royal property had descended to the King, he had a perfect right to make such dispositions concerning them as he should think fit for the benefit of those belonging to him. The testamentary arrangements which he hereupon submitted to them, and which descended into the minutest details, were then declared valid by the Witan, in the state that we possess them at the present day.‡ They afford us a convincing proof of the consideration and care manifested by Alfred for his wife and children, as well as for many others.

True conjugal fidelity bound Alfred to his wife, Ealhswith, during the whole course of his life; her patient endurance when sharing with him the heavy days of banishment and strife, had for ever put the seal upon his domestic happiness. Ealhswith never aspired to a sphere of action from which

\* Compare p. 140.

† Kemble, "Cod. Diplom." N. 314, has found good reasons, in the document itself, for attributing it to some period between the years 880 and 885.

‡ "And hī calle me ðæs hyra wedd sealdon and hyra hand-setene."

the feelings of the Saxons excluded her, but lived at home, devoting herself exclusively to her husband and the elementary instruction of her children. Nowhere do we find the slightest sign of this beautiful harmony having ever been disturbed. Alfred set apart for her maintenance several estates, among which there are two not without importance, as furnishing us with a noble proof of Alfred's delicacy of feeling: we allude to Wantage and Athandune,\* the former being the place where he was born, and the latter, the battle-field where his sword secured the freedom of his native country. Wantage remained royal property until the time of the Plantagenets. Our authorities, which confine themselves to material facts, tell us no more of Ealhswith. With a reputation for devotion, like that enjoyed by her mother, she survived the death of her husband, and, as mother of the young monarch, lived not far from the court, until death snatched her away in the year 905.†

Ealhswith bore her husband a number of children, some of whom died at an early age; among the survivors, the eldest was Athelfled, the Queen of the Mercians, a woman of strong mind and masculine deportment: she energetically supported her husband, Athelred, and at his death assumed the

\* "Ðone ham æt Lamoburnan and æt Waneting and æt Etandune."

† Kemble, "Cod. Diplom." N. 333,—a document concerning an exchange of some lands with the monastery at Malmesbury—is signed, immediately after King Edward, "Ealhswed, mater regis, Ælfredi coniunx." "Chron. Sax." A. 905.

reins of government herself. There are many documents proving the active part she took in public affairs.\* She died on the 12th June, 919: her only daughter seems to have had no family. Athelfled, like all her brothers and sisters, is liberally remembered in Alfred's will.

Edward, the heir to the throne, who had been brought up under his father's eye for the position he occupied, showed, even when a boy, that he would, in later years, prefer the qualities of the body to those of the mind; and this disposition is confirmed by his own reign. His son, Athelstan, fully justified his descent from so vigorous a race; history has even represented him as more personally heroic than his father himself, and poetry has enshrined his birth as it has his victories. Edward, when Atheling (so runs the account), had ridden out into the country one day, when he entered a shepherd's hut: here he beheld the shepherd's daughter, Egwyn, who captivated him by her beauty; a vision having, in a dream, previously announced to her the brilliant nature of her future prospects.† By this maiden, whose parents were perhaps something more than mere peasants, but certainly not noble, Edward had a son, Athelstan, and also a daughter. The boy was brought up at the court of his grandfather; and the latter, enchanted with his beauty and the refinement of

\* Kemble, N. 311, 330, 339, 340, 1068, 1073, 1075.

† W. Malmesb. II. § 139; but § 126, he names her "*illustris fœmina*," and then, again, § 131, he has, "*ut ferunt concubina*." In Florent. Wigorn. I. p. 117, she is called "*mulier nobilissima*."

his behaviour, prophesied that his reign would be a happy one, and equipped him when he was still a child as a warrior, by giving him a purple mantle, a girdle ornamented with precious stones, and a Saxon sword in a gold scabbard.\* The little grandson, who was, as it were, knighted by this proceeding, afterwards fulfilled most brilliantly his grandfather's prophecy. By two other wives, who enjoyed the rank of queens, Edward is known to have had twelve other children. The position occupied by many of them, and the accounts we have received of their lives, have prevented them from being forgotten; they were greatly instrumental in extending, by marriage, the power and the foreign relations of the country in an unusual degree. One daughter, Eadgifu, became the wife of Charles the Simple, King of France; another, Eadhild, was married to Hugo the Great, son of Robert, the powerful Duke of Neustria, Burgundy, and Francia. By these marriages, Athelstan kept up the most intimate relations with the two rival races in the empire of the West-Franks; namely, with the Carolingians, and the Capetians, who were endeavouring to wrest the kingdom from them. The most powerful ally, however, that he made, was the great Emperor, Otto I., who married his sister, Eadgyth. The ancient unity of the Saxon islanders and of the Old Saxons, shone brilliantly forth once more, at a period when their common race, with their greatest prince at its head, held the fate of Europe in its hands. A fourth daughter of Edward, whose

\* W. Malmesb. II. § 133.

name is said to have been Adgife, had for her husband some prince in the neighbourhood of the Alps.\* Ealgifu, the youngest and handsomest of all, became the wife of Louis, Duke of Aquitania. Athelstan, who had no children, was succeeded on the throne by his brother Edmund, Edward's third son. Such are the branches of this vigorous and far-spreading family tree.

Alfred's third child was Athelgeofu, Abbess of Shaftsbury, who, on account of her delicate state of health, chose a religious life, to which, with the property left her by her father, she remained true to the last. The year of her death is not given.

The hand of Alfred's third daughter, Alfthryd, was given by her father to Count Baldwin of Flanders, the son of his step-mother, Judith. Besides other property named in Alfred's last will, Alfthryd inherited the village of Lewesham, in Kent, which she left, in the year 916, to the monastery of St. Blandin, near Gent.† From her was descended the first Norman Queen of England, Matilda, the wife of William the Conqueror: she died in the year 929.‡

Alfred's youngest son, Athelward, was, to his father's great delight, a most zealous scholar, and a perfect model for all studious youth when he was a mere child. The large share which he re-

\* Æthelweard, *proëm.* I. 498; *Ingulph.* p. 878; *W. Malmesb.* II. § 127. Compare *Hrotsuithæ* "*Carmen de Gestis Oddonis*," I. ap. *Pertz*, *M. G. SS.* IV. 321.

† See *Lappenberg*, p. 347, n. 1.

‡ "*Annales Blandinienses*," ap. *Pertz*, *M. G. SS.* V. 24.

ceived of his father's private property, was situated in various parts of the country, and especially in the Celtic districts. Under his brother's reign he appears in the character of a royal prince, some few deeds being signed by him.\* He died on the 16th October, 922, and was buried in the royal vault at Winchester.† We possess information concerning three of his children, but, farther than that, all trace of his descendants is lost.

In conformity with the arrangement of Swinbeorh, which we have mentioned, Alfred faithfully left his two nephews, Athelhelm and Athelwald, the portion which had been assigned to each by their father. In their case the names of the various places are expressly mentioned. The younger, however, was not content with his share, that was as sufficient to support him in the rank and position of a near relation of the royal house, as the share assigned to the King himself was to support the latter. Not only did he endeavour to procure a greater amount of property, but even attempted to obtain possession of the crown; it is true that this would have descended to him by the direct line of succession, but it had been expressly taken from him in deeds whose authenticity it was impossible to controvert. He was hereupon declared an enemy of his king, and a traitor to his country. We have already mentioned his death in the year 905. Athelhelm was

\* "Æthelweard, filius regis," Kemble, "Cod. Diplom." N. 335, 337.

† "Florent. Wigorn." I. p. 130.

more easily satisfied than his brother. He is, probably, that son of King Athelred, from whom the historian, Athelweard, boasts of being descended.\*

Alfred mentions in his will another relation of the name of Osferth,† to whom he leaves several villages, but of whose relation to the royal family we know nothing more. To judge from his name, he may, possibly, be a descendant of the family of Osburh.

Such are the direct and collateral branches of Alfred's house. To enable them to support their rank in a befitting manner, they all inherited both land and money. They were all provided for by Alfred with the greatest conscientiousness, which extends even to the minutest details, in order that he might truly fulfil the directions of his ancestors. But, in spite of this, he never lost sight of the importance of a direct line of succession. He desired that his heir should always surpass all his other relations, and all the nobles of the land in riches and landed property, and always be in the possession of separate private property. The old conservative principle that actuated him is most evident from his own words.

"And it is my will that those who hold land shall follow the regulation that is contained in my father's will, as far as they are able. And whenever I have ever withheld a feoff from any one, my relations shall at least let him have it in

\* Æthelweard, IV. p. 514.

† Kemble, "Cod. Diplom." N. 314. "Osferðe mīnum mæge." There is a minister of the name of Osferð in many of King Edward's documents.



feoff. It is my will that those to whom I have promised a grant of land shall never give it to be possessed by any one after their life to the injury of my race, but it shall then go to the person nearest to me, provided they have no children. But I should prefer it to remain in the hands of my male descendants as long as they are worthy of it. My great-grandfather left his land to those who wielded the spear, and not to those who used the distaff. If therefore I ever gave anything to a person on the female side, my relations must pay him for it if they desire to have it again during his lifetime; if this is not the case, let it be disposed of according to the rule we have already laid down. They shall pay for it, however, as they are my heirs, to whom, both in the female and the male line, I can give as I think proper.”\*

The various sums named by Alfred afford us much interesting information concerning his relation to the members of his own family, and his officers. To each of his sons, as his principal heirs, he leaves five hundred pounds in ready money, and to each of his three daughters, and his wife, Ealhswith, one hundred pounds. Each of his Ealdormen, among whom Athelhelm, Athelwald, and Osferth are mentioned by name, is to receive one hundred mancuses; to Athelred, the ruler of Mercia, a sword of the value of one hundred and twenty mancuses, is left as a peculiar mark of esteem. Among his serving-men, whom he was accustomed

\* Kemble, “Cod. Diplom.” N. 314. Compare “Leg. Ælfr.” p. 41.



to pay at Easter,\* two hundred pounds are to be distributed, in a ratio proportioned to the claims of each, and according to the rule that he himself followed with them. The faithfully devoted clergy has also its place assigned it in his will. One hundred mancuses each are set aside for the archbishop, the bishops Esne and Werfrith, and the Bishop of Sherburne, but whether by the last we are to understand Asser or Wulfsige, it is impossible to determine.† A sum of two hundred pounds is left, for the salvation of his own and his father's soul, to those to whom either he or his father ever promised a donation: of this, four equal portions are intended for the entire body of consecrated priests in his kingdom, for poor priests and for the church in which he himself desires to be buried. This was Winchester Cathedral, to the bishopric of which place all the landed property he possesses in Kent is left in an earlier passage of his will. After these directions he adds that he is not quite sure whether his treasure is sufficient to pay all these various legacies, though he thinks that it amounts to a larger sum. Should this be the case, he orders that the surplus shall be divided among the legatees, not omitting the Ealdormen and serving-men. With reference to any former dispositions, when his fortune was greater, and his relatives more numerous, he re-

\* "ðam mannum ðe me folgiað, ðe ic nû on eástertîdum feoh sealde."

† In a more modern Latin Translation of the will, we find: "Et Assero de Schireburn," Kemble, "Cod. Diplom." N. 1067.

marks that since the circumstances were changed he had burnt the dispositions in question, but should any be found by chance, he declares them invalid, and says that the present will, which has been acknowledged and authenticated by the states of his kingdom is the only one that is to be followed.

The document closes with a direction that is quite worthy of the noble and philanthropical disposition of the King. Alfred accords a great boon to all his serfs and freedmen. The poor people who are personally bound to him, as well as the actual serfs in his service, are to have full liberty of passing to any other master or estate they may choose.\* No one is to extort any indemnity from them, and both classes of servants are to be allowed to follow their own option in their selection of service. In the name of God and his saints, Alfred begs his relations and executors to employ the greatest vigilance in this particular, and to see that no landed proprietor acts in an arbitrary manner contrary to it, for he has himself commanded that it should be so, and the Witan of the West-Saxons have acknowledged it to be right.

Such were the arrangements, concerning the property he should one day leave behind him, which were made by Alfred shortly after he had reconquered his throne, and there is no doubt that they were most conscientiously carried out. But for the various undertakings in which, during the following years, he was engaged for the purpose of securing

\* "Cyrelif is a person who has a right of choice, or who has exercised a choice." Kemble, "The Saxons in England."

the safety of the Church and State, and elevating his whole people to a higher state of moral greatness, large sums were continually required, even in his days, and these sums he took from the revenues of his own royal property. In the expenditure of them he was governed by the same exactness and love of order, that we have seen manifested in the punctuality with which he discharged the manifold duties of his office.

His yearly revenues were divided into two equal parts,\* one of which was set aside for the maintenance of the temporal power and prosperity of his kingdom, and the other for its spiritual welfare. The first half was divided into three parts, and the first of these employed in the payment of the military officers of his kingdom, whom he did not forget in his will. We learn from this, also, the manner in which the noble officers of state, and the armed force which was always obliged to be in attendance at Court fulfilled the duties attached to their various posts. He had introduced a regular rule of service, in conformity to which the whole army was divided into three separate bodies, one of which had to serve uninterruptedly for an entire month, wherever the Court happened to be staying. At the commencement of a fresh month, the division on duty was replaced by that next in succession, so that two-thirds of the officials were always at liberty to follow their own occupations at home, and Alfred,

\* The following facts are derived from Asser, pp. 495, 496, and constitute, unquestionably, the most genuine portion of the work ascribed to him.

who observed this regulation with the greatest strictness, never took up more than four months of his subjects' time in each year. Every one was paid for his duty in proportion to his rank and office. A second sum was set apart for the various buildings in progress, on which a great number of work-people, especially from abroad, were employed. A third sum was destined for the foreigners who came from the most distant parts to Alfred's Court, and was devoted to affording them assistance, whether they were in actual want or not. The King always had the means at hand of satisfying his liberal feelings on every occasion.

The second half of his revenues which was dedicated to support the Church was divided into four subdivisions. The first was expended in works of charity for the poor of all nations, as, according to Asser's words, Alfred was always mindful of the saying of Gregory the Great : " Neither give much to him who needs little, nor little to him who needs much ; do not refuse him who needs a little, nor give to him who needs nothing."\* The second portion was dedicated to the maintenance of the two monasteries which he had founded and of the brothers who inhabited them. With the third portion he supported the school which he had established, principally for the benefit of the nobly-born youth of his people, and, finally, the fourth portion was set aside for all the neighbouring monastic institutions in Wessex and Mercia. Of this

\* Asser, p. 496: " Nec parvum qui multum, nec multum cui parvum ; nec nihil cui aliquid, nec aliquid cui nihil."

last portion, too, a certain sum, that varied every year, was assigned to the numerous religious houses in Wales, Cornwall, France, Armorica, Northumbria, and even Ireland. Alfred desired to assist the holy servants of God even abroad, and to excite them to the performance of good works. Some part of this money may have been received by the church of Durham, which afterwards boasted of Alfred's offerings to St. Cuthbert.\*

Setting out from these noble proofs of Alfred's sincerity and generosity, we may, in conclusion, be allowed to take one comprehensive view of all the virtues and excellent qualities with which he was adorned.

No one has preserved an account of Alfred's figure and appearance, such as we are enabled to form of Charlemagne, from Einhard's masterly sketch of him. Alfred's name does not suggest to us the idea of a colossal figure, but, on the contrary, rather gives us an idea of a form about the middle size, originally strong and healthy, and whose powers of endurance were preserved intact during long years of illness and frequent bodily fatigue, but which, ere Alfred had attained any very great age, finally succumbed beneath the load of ills from which he was very seldom free. With unparalleled resolution, however, Alfred succeeded in overcoming this evil, which he looked upon as sent from God. His combats and his privations in the field, the exertions that it cost him to set the

\* Simeon Dunelm. "Hist. Reg. Angl." A. 883. Ejusdem, "Hist. Eccles." II. p. 13.

sluggish nature of his people in motion, in order to adopt measures for their own defence, and his continual intellectual occupations of all kinds, must, when combined, have been instrumental in causing him to forget his infirmities, which seldom left him, and also have enabled him to conceal from those with whom he associated, any symptoms of what he suffered. His weak and infirm body was always sustained by his healthy, active, and elastic mind.

The qualities of his mind were those of a statesman and a hero, but elevated, and, at the same time, softened by his ardent longing for higher and more imperishable things than those on which all the splendour and power of this world generally rest. The most unshakable courage was most certainly the first component of his being: he showed it when still a youth, in the tumult of the battle of Ascesdune. There was one period when his courage seemed about to desert him. This was when the young King imagined that he saw his country for ever in the hands of the foe, and his people doomed to never-ending despair, but from the ordeal of Athelney he came out proved and victorious, and a large number of brave men rivalled each other in imitating his example.

We have already had occasion, several times, in the course of this work, to notice another peculiarity of Alfred's mind, that was attended with no less gratifying results; he possessed a decided turn for invention, which enabled him not only to extricate himself from personal difficulties, but to suggest new and original ideas in the execution

of all kinds of artistic productions and handiwork. The pillars on which the church at Athelney was built, the long ships he constructed, the manner in which he turned a river from its natural course, and his clock of tapers, afford us as convincing evidence of his powers of thought, as the battles which he gained. It seems that for him it was a particularly easy task to learn anything new, and to turn what he had learnt to practical account. When, after a long pause, the Danes again compelled him to have recourse to arms, he opposed them with a degree of cunning and suppleness equal to their own, and actually succeeded, by this method, in obtaining the victory over them. This same man, this same king, when no longer young, turned his attention to study, and effected what no prince of his time, nor for centuries afterwards, even dared to think of undertaking. But the most praiseworthy points in his character, and the most powerful instruments by which alone he achieved such great things, were his diligence and perseverance. Riding, and the pleasures of the chase, of which, in his youth, he was passionately fond, he steadily practised all his life, for the benefit of his health, and in spite of all his bodily suffering. With the most unremitting zeal he turned his attention to the restoration of towns, fortified places, churches and monasteries, never losing sight of whatever could forward his own improvement, and its most important result, namely, the education of his people. He constantly and successfully endeavoured, by presents and every mark of kindness, to attach



to his court a number of foreigners, including Franks, Frisians, Britons, Scots, natives of Armorica, and even Heathens,\* so that both he himself, as well as his nobles and ecclesiastics, might have full leisure to profit by their society. The good effects of his untiring exertions were manifested, during his own life, in the progress made by the studious youth of his kingdom. He succeeded, too, in raising himself to the rank of one of the first authors of his people, and in contributing very much to their instruction and amusement, a fact which was gratefully acknowledged after the lapse of centuries.

The pious submission which Alfred manifested for the doctrines of Christianity, did not consist merely in a compliance with the demands of the orthodox church of his time; there was one trait in his character, proceeding from the inmost recesses of his heart, that had nourished and strengthened in him a lively belief in heavenly things. The long chain of misfortunes and trials, and the experience he had gained, the traces of which run through his whole life, had inspired him with this conviction far more than the sight of Rome, or the power claimed by the pope. Like a brave warrior of the Cross he always opposed the spirit of heathendom which his ancestors had long since renounced. He defended the country against its return, and directed his most strenuous efforts to reduce the conquered foe to perfect submission by means of conversion. With sword and pen, with hand and heart did he battle

\* Asser, p. 486.



for his faith, and had the satisfaction, during his own life, of winning the victor's reward." He followed in his devotional exercises the same conscientious mode of proceeding which was peculiar to him in everything that he did. One half of his time, like one half of his treasure, was dedicated to the service of God.\* Every day he attended divine worship and the celebration of mass, not only for the purpose of setting an example to those around him, but from a deeply-rooted yearning for prayer. Wherever he was he had the psalms and appointed service read to him, and he would often enter the church during the night to humble himself in silent prayer free from interruption.† In his various acts of charity he treated the poor who needed assistance, whether natives or foreigners, as well as the churches and monasteries of all countries in the same generous manner. All had good reason for rejoicing at his kindness long after his death. With true Christian humility he was accustomed to lay bare his heart to his confidential friends, and to bow submissively in the inmost recesses of his soul to the will of his Creator, who had not thought fit to grant him his holy wisdom, nor all the means necessary for attaining unto it.‡ Pride and arrogance were strangers to his breast. The consciousness of his own weaknesses told him that he had not been able to effect what he ought to have effected.

\* Asser, p. 495.

† Asser, p. 486.

‡ "Eo quod Deus omnipotens cum expertem divinæ sapientiæ et liberalium artium fecisset." Asser, p. 486.

Elevated by his piety above all his subjects and contemporaries, no one could be farther than he was from becoming a weak bigot, willingly bending beneath the yoke of an arrogant priesthood, and, while immersed in the fulfilment of his religious duties, forgetting the prosperity of worldly affairs as well as that of his subjects. He was well aware what the country had suffered from the too yielding disposition of his father to the will of the higher ecclesiastics. It is impossible to draw a parallel between Alfred and his descendant Edward the Confessor. The latter lost his kingdom, and was made a saint, the former kept it by the aid of his sword and a firm reliance on the Almighty. The church of Rome, it is true, did not thank him for this, but he lived, through his works, in the hearts of his people who celebrated his praises in their songs.

There was no occasion during his time for any differences with the supreme head of the church ; on the contrary, he entered into a friendly alliance with the Pope, and continued to give those sums which Athelwulf had assigned to Rome. That this place was the centre of the church from which all laws relating to matters of faith emanated he was firmly convinced ; like all his contemporaries he paid homage to the errors and abuses sanctioned by Rome, without suspecting that many things had been very different and far better, during the first ages of Christianity. But the comparatively independent attitude assumed by the Anglo-Saxon Church almost from the beginning was still more marked during his reign : her first dignitaries were, with-

out exception, Saxons who had been brought up at home.

On the other hand, however, Alfred did not hesitate in calling to his aid foreign ecclesiastics, and, what is more, in confiding to them the direction of his educational institutions in the monasteries. The language of the country was employed, as it had been before, in the service of the church, and, although the King did all in his power to forward the study of Latin, his whole energies were devoted to introducing the word of God among all classes of his people by means of a Germanic translation. The distance of the country from Rome, and the national administration of the various religious communities allowed him even to relax somewhat of the Romish discipline in matters of doctrine. A peculiar instance of this is to be found in his Decalogue at the commencement of his code of laws. In accordance with the resolution of the Council of Nice, Alfred omits the second Commandment, but supplies its place by a tenth commandment, against the worship of images, conceived in the spirit of the Mosaic law, and greatly at variance with the custom of Rome.\* If it could be satisfactorily proved that the Irish John, that liberal-minded philosopher in the dark age in which he lived, was hospitably received, and generously supported by Alfred, it would, indeed, be an action worthy of the high-minded King to have protected a man, who, because he entertained different ideas with regard to Tran-

\* Lingard, "History and Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church," II. p. 468.

substantiation and Predestination, was most bitterly pursued by the Church of Rome.\* Alfred's spirit of independence could not submit unconditionally to all the bonds by which liberal opinions were fettered, and this trait in his character was not viewed with a favourable eye at Rome. In spite of all his partiality for the church, Alfred's train of feeling and thought was more Teutonic than Roman Catholic, and in him do we perceive some of the principal features of the spirit of Protestantism.

The same independence marked his conduct in his elevated temporal office. Providence had fixed his birth at a period when Royalty was in a decided state of transition. The consciousness felt by all nations of Teutonic descent of the popular sources of the royal power was on the decrease. In England only was that feeling less shaken than on the Continent. The transition to the feudal system took place in England very slowly and regularly, like every other political change in that wonderful country, and it certainly cannot be denied that Alfred's reign was a step in this development. We compared Egberht with Charlemagne, but, among the Franks, the decomposition of the existing state of things and the change in the old system began with extraordinary rapidity simultaneously with the fall of the Carolingians, while Alfred, on the contrary, protected the Teutonic element in all its purity for centuries afterwards, so that the influence of the new

\* Bicknell, "Life of Alfred the Great," pp. 290-294, a work in which much that is good is mixed up with a great deal that is false.

system which was making its way with irresistible power, was only gradually felt. We have already seen that Alfred was a very different kind of prince from the king of a petty German state at the head of his warriors. In his reign the germs of a court began to unfold themselves around the person of the monarch. The nobility, who were formerly independent and next to the King in rank, began to enter the royal service, and to renounce all claims to the supreme power, which was hereditary, and the regal individuality reared its head, like a tower, far above the rest of the social edifice around it. Whatever may be urged against the Great King, he certainly cannot be charged with arbitrariness or capricious encroachment upon the privileges of his people, and the care displayed by him in the compilation of his code of laws is really wonderful. A true spirit of Conservatism caused him to cling to every old custom that gave any signs of still possessing life. The same well-matured prudence in matters of reform, which distinguishes the great English statesmen of the present age, was also peculiar to Alfred, whenever he determined to reject what was old and supply its place with something new, that, in accordance with his religious views, he was especially careful should agree with the spirit of Christianity. His endeavours to propagate this spirit are quite as great as his evident desire to occupy as a Christian prince his elevated worldly position.

Never did he attempt to undermine the political foundations of his kingdom. When all lay in ruins, he displayed the most untiring perseverance in

restoring, as far as possible, the former order of things. His penetrating glance was the very first to observe the heaviness and indolence which were the principal defects in the Saxon and Low-German nationality, and he endeavoured in every possible manner to nullify their ill-effects, sometimes by friendly advice and warning, and sometimes, when his patience was exhausted by repeated acts of disobedience, by well-meant punishment. It required all the natural activity of his spirit to set in motion the resources which slumbered in his people, and to turn them to their full account, as well as to root out of their hearts the manifold obstinate prejudices which were implanted there.\* Alfred was aware that old age is not only averse to learn anything new itself but inclined to offer obstructions to the course of justice, and he therefore worked upon their feelings of shame through the diligence of the rising generation, for he was convinced that in the latter lay hid the germs of knowledge and a better observance of law and right. It was only by his own personal example that he was enabled to induce his people to take a part in the task of fortifying and defending their country. He carried his plans into effect, however, and the Saxons of every rank had reason to congratulate themselves, on again recovering their freedom through Alfred's exertions, that they enjoyed a state of far greater

\* Asser, p. 492: "*Leniter docendo, adulando, hortando, imperando, ad ultimum inobedientes post longam patientiam acriùs castigando, vulgarem stultitiam et pertinaciam omni modo abominando.*"

security than they ever did before. The numerous population of serfs, too, who had previously been looked on in the light of living property, obtained from him the incalculable advantage of choosing their own service, and, with their noble and free countrymen, held the King's memory, long after his death, in grateful remembrance.

For these reasons does Alfred's name shine brilliantly in the book of Universal History, undefamed by envy or ignorance, and uninjured by any faults of his own. He certainly was not quite free from the latter, but they have almost entirely been forgotten in the refulgent glory of his virtues, which, after the lapse of centuries, is not yet dimmed. Like some precious metal, he had been freed from dross by the ordeal and refining of heavy misfortune. But we must not on this account alone flatter a great man who has pursued a truly noble course of life from a consciousness of duty and a strong moral feeling. No king or hero of ancient or modern times can be compared to Alfred, as possessing so many pure and inestimable qualities. In the midst of all the might and power of celebrated princes, who have reigned over much larger countries, we invariably find some defect in their moral character, which stands out in startling contrast to their intellectual peculiarities. Although their towering forms appear when compared with that of Alfred, who ruled only the little kingdom of Wessex, to reach the stars, his figure, small as it may be, is still one of the most perfect



that the hand of God ever held up as a model to the world, and to those who rule over it.

For a thousand years has he now lived as a bright example to the memory of mankind, and the people whom he governed have, since his time, spread themselves over the face of the globe, carrying their country with them wherever they go, and propagating freedom and independence both by word and deed. Alfred carefully tended the germ of the proud tree which now spreads its branches far and wide over the earth, when it appeared unable to force its way through the ground. When he confided it to the care of succeeding ages, it was already a flourishing sapling. After Alfred, many great men devoted their attention to it, each furthering its development according to his own peculiar method. William the Conqueror bent, with an iron hand, the young branches to his will, while Henry II. ruled the Saxons with true Roman pride. But in Magna Charta the old German element is once more revived, and its powerful workings are visible, even under the Barons. It becomes free under that ambitious prince, Edward III., and the old language and the old law, almost uninjured and greatly softened in tone, again succeed in causing themselves to be acknowledged. The people resemble an oak in the full force of green and healthy vigour, and it is to this vigour that England owes the successful termination of her struggle in the cause of the Reformation. Elizabeth, the greatest woman that ever sat upon a throne, forms the centre



of a golden age of power and literature. Then came the Stuarts, who, under the influence of anti-national ideas, offended the deeply-rooted Saxon peculiarities of the English, and, by their own fall, were instrumental in securing still more the freedom of the people, the foundations of which had been laid in times long past. After them, the sturdy Cromwell and the politic William cleared for the nation, which had then attained its manhood, that path which it has since followed. The Anglo-Saxon element has, too, already attained its majority in the New World, and, founded on the same basis, will everywhere and at all times, continue to flourish. Among the great spirits, which are connected with this grand work, Alfred's name will always live as long as mankind shall respect the past, while none of the others can ever be compared with the West-Saxon prince in the harmonious union of his virtues, or as the saviour of his people from total destruction.



## I.

# FRAGMENTS FROM ALFRED'S WRITINGS.

### *a.* PREFACE TO BOETHIUS.\*

AELFRED kyning wæs wealhstod ðisse bec. and hie of boclædene on englisc wende. swa hio nu is gedon. hwilum he sette word be worde. hwilum andgit of andgite. swa swa he hit þa sweetolost and andgit-fullicost gereccan mihte. for þæm mistlicum and manigfealdum weoruld-bisgum þe hine oft ægðer ge on mode ge on lichoman bisgodan. Ða bisgu us sint swiþe earfoþ-rime þe on his dagum on þa ricu becomon þe he underfangen hæfde. and þeah þa he þas boc hæfde geleornode. and of lædene to engliscum spelle gewende. þa geworhte he hi æfter to leoþe. swa swa heo nu gedon is. and nu bit and for godes naman he healsað ælcne þara þe þas boc rædan lyste. þæt he for hine gebidde. and him ne wite gif he hit rihtlicor ongite þonne he mihte. forþæm þe ælc mon sceal be his audgites mæðe. and be his æmettan sprecan þæt he sprecð. and don þæt þæt he deþ.

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CAP. I. On ðære tide þe Gotan of Sciððiu mægðe wið Romana rice gewin upahofon and mid † heora

\* From MS. Bod. 180, collated with Cardale, "King Alfred's Boethius."

† MS. "Mið."

cypingum. Rædgota and Eallerica wæron hatne. Romane byrig abraecon. and eall Italia-rice þæt is betwux þam muntum and Sicilia þam ealonde in anwald gerehton. and þa æfter þam foresprecenan cynningum ðeodric feng to þam ilcan rice. se ðeodric wæs Amulinga. he wæs cristen. þeah he on þam Arrianiscan gedwolan þurhwunode. he gehet Romanum his freondscipe. swa þæt hi mostan heora ealdrihta wyrðe beon. ac he þa gehat swiðe yfele gelæst. and swiðe wraðe geendode. mid manegum mane. þæt wæs to eacan oðrum unarimedum yflum. þæt he Johannes þone papan het ofslean. þa wæs sum consul þæt we heretoha hatað. Boetius wæs gehaten. se wæs in boccræftum and on woruld-þeawum se rihtwifesta. Se þa ongeat manigfealdan yfel þe se cyning ðeodric wið þam cristenandome and wið þam Romaniscum witum dyde. he þa gemunde þara eðnessa and þara ealdrihta þe hi under þam caserum hæfdon heora ealdhlafordum. þa ongan he smeagan and leornigan on him selfum hu he þæt rice þam unrihtwisan cyninge aferran mihte. and on ryhtgeleaffulra and on rihtwisra anwealde gebringan. sende þa digellice ærendgewritu to þam casere to Constantinopolim. þær is Creca heahburg and heora cynestol. for þam se casere wæs heora ealdhlaford cynnes. bædon hine þæt he him to heora cristendome and to heora ealdrihtum gefultumede. þa þæt ongeat se wælhreowa cyning ðeodric. þa het he hine gebringan on carcerne and þær inne belucan. þa hit þa gelomp þæt se arwyrða wæs on swa micelre nearanesse becoman.\* þa wæs he swa micle swiðor on his mode gedrefed. swa his mod ær

\* MS. "becom."

swiðor to þam woruld-sælþum gewunod wæs. and he þa nanre frofre be innan þam carcerne ne gemunde. ac he gefeoll niwol of dune on flor and hine astrehte swiðe unrot. and ormod hine selfne ongan wepan and þus singende cwæð.

## b. FROM OROSIUS.\*

### *α. Alfred's Germania.*

Nu wille we ymb Eurôpa land-gemære reccan, swa mycel swa we hit fyrmest witon, fram þære eá Danais west oð Rhîn ða eá, seo wylð of þæm beorge þe man Alpis hæet, and yrnð þonne norðryhte on þæs garsecges earm, þe þæt land utan-ymb lið þe man Bryttannia hæet, and æft suð oþ Donua þa eá, þære æwylme is neah þære eá Rînes, and is siððan east yrnende wið Crecaland út on þone Wendelsæ, and norð oþ þone garsecg þe man Cwen-sæ hæet, binnan þæm syndon manega ðeoda; ac hit man hæet ealle Germania.

Ðonne wyð norðan Donua æwylme, and be eastan Rîne syndon East-francan; and be suðan him syndon Swæfas, on oðre healfe þære eá Donua, and be suðan him and be eastan syndon Bægðware, se dæl þe man Regnesburh hæet; and rihte be aestan him syndon Beme, and east-norð syndon Ðyringas, and be norðan him syndon Eald-Seaxan, and be norðan-westan him syndon Frysan. And be westan Eald-Seaxum is Aelfemuða þære eá, and Frysland, and þanon west-norð is þæt land þe man Angle hæet, and Sillende,

\* From Thorpe's "Analecta Anglosaxonica," ed. II. p. 81, et seq.

and sum dæl Dena, and be norðan him is Apdrede, and east-norð Wylte, þe man Aefeldan hæet, and be eastan him is Winedaland, þe man hæet Sysyle, and east-suð, ofer sumne dæl, Maroaro. And hī Maroaro habbað be westan him Ðyringas and Behemas and Bægðware healfe, and be suðan him, on oðre healfe Donua þære eá, is þæt land Carendre suð oð beorgas þe man hæet Alpis. To þæm ilcan beorgum licgað Bægðwara land-gemære and Swæfa; and þonne be eastan Carendran lande, begeondan þæm wæstenne, is Pulgaraland, and be eastan þæm is Crecaland; and be eastan Meroarolande is Wisleland, and be eastan þæm sind Datia, þa þe in wæron Gottan; be eastan-norðan Maroara syndon Dalamensan, and be eastan Dalamensam sindon Horithi, and be norðan Dalomensam sindon Surpe, and be westan him sindon Sysele; be norðan Horithi is Mægðalond, and be norðan Mægðalande Sermende, oð ða beorgas Riffin; and be westan Suð-Denum is þæs garsecges earm þe lið ymbutan þæt land Brittania; and be norðan him is þæs sæs earm þe man hæet Ost-sæ, and be eastan him and be norðan him syndon Norþ-Dene, ægþær ge on þæm maran landum ge on þæm iglandum; and be eastan him syndon Afdrede, and be suðan him is Aelfemuða þære eá, and Eald-Seaxna sum dæl.

Norð-Dene habbað him be norðan þone ilcan sæs earm þe man Ost-sæ hæet, and be eastan him sindon Osti ða leode, and Afdrede be suðan; Osti habbað be norðan him þone ilcan sæs earm, and Winedas, and Burgendas; and be suðan him syndon Hæfeldan; Burgendan habbað þone ylcan sæs earm be westan him, and Sweon be norðan; and be eastan him sint

Sermende, and be suðan him Surfe; Sweon habbað be suðan him þone sæs earm Osti, and be easten him Sermende, and be norðan ofer þa westennu is Cwénland; and be westan-norðan him sindon Scríde-Finnas, and be westan Norðmenn.

*β. Ohthere's Description of his Voyage.*

Ohthere sæde his hlaforde, Aelfrede kynincge, þæt he ealra Norðmanna norðmest bude. He cwæð þæt he bude on þam lande norðweardum wið þa West-sæ; he sæde þeah þæt þæt land sy swyðe lang norð þanon, ac hit is eall weste, buton on feawum stowum sticcemælum wiciað Finnas on huntaðe on wintra, and on sumera on fiscoðe be þære sæ. He sæde þæt he æt sumum cyrre wolde fandian, hu lange þæt land norð-rihte læge, oððe hwæper ænig man be norðan þæm westene bude: þa fór he norð-rihte be þæm lande, let him ealne weg þæt weste land on þæt steorbord, and þa wíð-sæ on bæcbord, þry dagas: þa wæs he swa feor norð swa ða hwæl-huntan fyrrest farað. Þa for he þa-gyt norð-ryhte swa he mihte on þæm oðrum þrim dagum geseglian; þa beah þæt land þær easte-ryhte, oððe sio sæ in on þæt land, he nyste hwæper, buton he wiste þæt he þær bád westan windes, oððe hwôn norðan, and seglede þanon east be lande, swa swa he mihte on feower dagum geseglian; þa sceolde he bídian ryhte norðan windes, forðan þæt land þær beah suð-rihte, oððe seo sæ in on þæt land, he nyste hwæper. Þa seglede he þanon suð-rihte be lande, swa swa he mihte on fíf dagum geseglian. Ða læg þær án mycel eá úp in þæt land; þa cyrdon hy up in on ða eá, forðæm hy ne dorston forð be þære eá

seglian for unfriðe, forþæm þæt land wæs eall gebūn on oðre healfe þære éa. Ne mette he ær nān gebūn land syððan he fram his āgnum hame fōr; ac him wæs ealne weg weste land on þæt steorbord, butan fisceran and fugeleran and huntan; and þæt wæron ealle Finnas, and him wæs á wīd-sæ on þat bæcbord.

Ða Beormas hæfdon swiðe well gebūn hyra land, ac hi ne dorston þær-on cuman; ac ðara Terfinna land wæs eall weste, butan þær huntan gewicodon, oððe fisceras, oððe fugeleras. Fela spella him sædon þa Beormas, ægðer ge of hyra agenum lande ge of þæm landum þe ymb hy utan wæron; ac he nyste hwæt þæs soðes wæs, forþæm he hit sylf ne geseah. Þa Finnas, him þuhte, and þa Beormas spræcon neah ān geðeode.

Swyðost he fōr ðyder, to-eacan þæs landes sceawunge, for þæm hors-hwælum, forþæm hi habbað swyðe æðele bān on hyra toðum. Þa teð hy brohton sume þæm cynincge; and hyra hyd bið swiðe gōd to scip-rāpum. Se hwæl bið micle læsse þonne oðre hwalas, ne bið he lengra þonne syfan elna lang. Ac on his āgnum lande is se betsta hwæl-huntað; þa beoð eahta and feowertiges elna lange, and þa mæstan fiftiges elna lange; þara hē sæde þæt he syxa sum ofsloge syxtig on twām dagum. He wæs swiðe spedig man on þæm æhtum þe heora speda on beoð, þæt is, on wildeorum: he hæfde þa-gyt, þa he þone cyning sohte, tamra deora unbebohtra syx hund. Ða deor hi hatað hrānas, þara wæron syx stæl-hrānas; þa beoð swyðe dyre mid Finnum, forþæm hy foð þa wildan hrānas mid. He wæs mid þæm fyrstum mannum on þæm lande, næfde he þeah ma þonne twentig



hryðera, and twentig sceapa, and twentig swyna; and þæt lytle þæt he erede he crede mid horsan; ac hyra ár is mæst on þæm gafole þe ða Finnas him gyldað, ðæt gafol bið on deora fellum, and on fugela feðerum, and hwæles bāne, and on þæm scip-rāpum þe beoð of hwæles hyde geworht, and of seoles. Aeghwilk gylt be his gebyrdum, se byrdesta sceal gildan fiftyne mearðes fell, and fif hrānes, and ān beran fell, and tyn ambra feðra, and berenne kyrtel, oððe yterenne, and twegen scip-rāpas, æghƿer sy syxtig elna lang, oƿer sy of hwæles hyde geworht, oðer of sioles.

He sæde þæt Norðmanna land wære swyðe lang and swyðe smæl. Eall þæt his man aƿer oððe ettan oððe erian mæg, þæt lið wið þa sæ, and þæt is þeah on sumum stowum swyðe cludig, and licgað wilde moras wið eastan, and wið uppon emnlange þæm bynum lande. On þæm morum eardiað Finnas. And þæt byne land is easteweard bráðost, and symle swa norðor swa smælre: easteweard hit mæg bion syxtig mila bráð, oððe hwene brædre, and middeweard þritig oððe brádre; and norðeweard, he cwæð, þær hit smalost wære, þæt hit mihte beon þreora mila bráð to þæm more, and se mór syðþan on sumum stowum swa bráð swa man mæg on twamwucum oferferan; and on sumum stowum swa bráð swa man mæg on syx dagum oferferan.

Ðonne is to-emnes þæm lande suðeweardum on oðre healfe þæs mores Sweoland, oƿ þæt land norðweard, and to-emnes þæm lande norðeweardum, Cwenaland. Ða Cwenas hergiað hwilum on þa Norðmen ofer þone mór, hwilum þa Norðmen on hy. And þær sint swiðe micle meras fersce geond þa moras; and berað þa Cwenas hyra scyƿu ofer land on þa meras, and þanon

hergiað on þa Norðmen. Hy habbað swyðe lytle scipa, and swiðe leohte.

Ohthere sæde þæt sio scír hatte Halgoland, þe he on bude. He cwæð þæt nān man ne bude be norðan him. Þonne is ān port on suðewearðum þæm lande, þone man hæť Sciringes-heal, þyder he cwæð þæt man ne mihte geseglian on ānum monðe, gyf man on niht wicode, and ælce dæge hæfde ambyrne wind. And ealle þa hwile he sceal seglian be lande, and on þæt steorbord, him bið ærest Isaland, and þonne þa igland þe synd betwux Isalande and þissum lande. Þonne is þis land oð he cymð to Sciringes-heale, and ealne weg on þæt bæcbord Norðwege. Bi wið suðan þone Sciringes-heal fylð swyðe mycel sæ up in on þæt land, seo is brādre þonne ænig man oferseon mæge; and is Gotland on oðre healfe ongean, and siðða Sillende. Seo sæ lið mænig hund mila up in on þæt land.

And of Sciringes-heale, he cwæð þæt he séglode on fíf dagum to þæm porte þe mon hæť æť Hæðum, se stent betuh Winedum and Seaxum and Angle, and hyrð in on Dene. Ða he þiderweard séglode from Sciringes-heale, þa wæs him on þæt bæcbord Denamearc, and on þæt steorbord wíd-sæ þry dagas; and þa twegen dagas ær he to Hæpum come, him wæs on þæt steorbord Gotland and Sillende and iglanda fela. On þæm lande eardodon Engle, ær hi hider on land comon. And hym wæs þa twegen dagas on þæt bæcbord þa igland þe in Denemearce hyrað.

γ. *Wulfstan's Description of his Voyage.*

Wulfstān sæde þæt he gefore of Hæðum, þæt he wære on Trúso on syfan dagum and nihtum, þæt þæt

scyp wæs ealne weg yrnende under segle. Weonodland him wæs on steorbord, and on bæcbord him wæs Langaland, and Læland, and Falster, and Scóneg, and þas land eall hyrað to Denemearcan. And þonne Burgendaland wæs ús on bæcbord; and þá habbað him-sylf cyning. Ðonne æfter Burgendalande wæron ús þas land þasynd hátene, ærest Blecingég, and Meore, and Eowland, and Gotland on bæcbord, and þas land hyrað to Sweon. And Weonodland wæs ús ealne weg on steorbord oð Wisle-muðan. Seo Wisle is swiðe mycel eá, and heo tolið Witland and Weonodland; and þæt Witland belimpeð to Estum, and seo Wisle lið út of Weonodlande, and lið in Estmere; and se Estmere is huru fiftene mila bráð. Þonne cymeð Ilfing eastan in Estmere, of þam mere þe Trúso standeð in staðe, and cumað út samod in Estmere Ilfing eastan of Eastlande, and Wisle suðan of Winodlande; and þonne benimð Wisle Ilfing hire naman, and ligeð of þæm mere west and norð on sæ; forðy hit man hæf Wisle-muðan.

Ðæt Eastland is swiðe mycel, and þær bið swyðe manig burh, and on ælcere byrig bið cyningc, and þær bið swyðe mycel hunig and fiscað; and se cyning and þa rícostan men drincað myran meole, and þa únspeðigan and þa þeówan drincað médo. Ðær bið swyðe mycel gewinn betweenan him, and ne bið ðær nænig ealo gebrowen mid Estum, ac þær bið médo genoh. And þær is mid Estum ðeaw, þonne þær bið man dead, þæt he lið inne unforbærned, mid his magum and freondum, monað, gehwílum twegen; and þa kyningas and þa oðre heahðungene men swa micle lencg swa hi maran speda habbað; hwílum healf

geār þæt hi beoð unforbærned, and licgað bufan eorðan on hyra husum. And ealle þa hwile þe þæt lic bið inne, þær sceal beon gedrync and plega, oð ðone dæg þe hi hine forbærnað. Þonne þy ylcan dæg hi hine to þæm áde beran willað, þonne todælað hi his feoh þæt þær to lafe bið, æfter þæm gedrynce and þæm plegan, on fíf oððe syx, hwilum on mǣ, swa swa þæs feos andefn bið. Alecgað hit þonne forhwæga on ánre mile þone mæstan dæl fram þæm tune, þonne oðerne, þonne þæne þridan, oþþe hyt eall alled bið on þære ánre mile; and sceall beón se læsta dæl nyhst þæm tune ðe se deada man on lið. Ðonne sceolon beon gesamnode ealle ða men ðe swyftoste hors habbað on þæm lande, forhwæga on fíf milum, oððe on syx milum fram þæm feo. Ðonne ærnað hy ealle toward þæm feo; ðonne cymeð se man se þæt swifte hors hafað to þæm ærestan dæle and to þæm mæstan, and swa ælc æfter oðrum, oð hit bið eall genumen; and se nimð þone læstan dæl se nyhst ðæm tune ðæt feoh geærneð. And þonne rideð ælc hys weges mid ðan feoh, and hyt motan habban eall; and forðy þær beoð þa swyftan hors ungefohge dyre. And þonne his gestreon beoð þus eall aspended, þonne byrð man hine út, and forbærneð mid his wæpnum and hrægle, and swiðost ealle his speda hy forspendað mid þam langan legere þæs deadan mannes inne, and þæs þe hy be þæm wegum alecgað, þe ða fremdan to ærnað and nimað. And þæt is mid Estum þeaw, þæt þær sceal ælces geðeodes man beon forbærned; and gyf þær man án bân findeð unforbærned, hi hit sceolan miclum gebetan. And þær is mid Eastum án mægð þæt hi magon cyle gewyrcan, and þy þær licgað

þa deadan men swa lange and ne fuliað, þæt hy wyrcað þone cyle hine on; and þeah man asette twægen fætels full ealað oððe wæteres, hy gedoð þæt oþer bið oferfrozen, sam hit sy summor sam winter.

c. PREFACE, INTRODUCTORY AND CONCLUDING VERSES OF THE TRANSLATION OF GREGORY THE GREAT'S PASTORAL.\*

ÐEOS BOC SCEAL TO WIOGORA CEASTRE.

Aelfred kyning hateð gretan Wærferð biscep his wordum luflice and freondlice. and ðe cyðan hate ðæt me com swiðe oft ón gemynd hwelce wiotan iu wæron giond Angel-cynn. ægðer ge godcundra hada. ge woruldcundra. and hu gesæliglica tida ða wæron giond Angel-cynn. and hu ða kyningas ðe ðone ónwald hæfdon ðæs folces. gode and his ærendwrecum hyrsumedon. and hie ægðer ge hiora sibbe ge hiora siedo. ge hiora ónweald innan bordes gelioldon. and eac út hiora eðel gerymdon. and hu him ða speow. ægðer ge mid wige. ge mid wisdom. and eac ða godcundan hadas. hu giorne hie wæron ægðer ge ymb lare ge ymb liornunga. ge ymb ealle ða ðiowotdomas. ðe hie gode scoldon. and hu man utan bordes. wisdom and lare hieder on land sohte. and hu we hy nu sceoldon ute begietan. gif we hie habban sceoldon. Swa clæne hio wæs oð-feallenn on Angel-cynne. dæt swiðe

\* According to MS. Hatton, 20, in the Bodleian Library, printed in nearly its original state, as a specimen of the West-Saxon dialect.

feawa wæron be-hionan Humbre ðe hiora ðeninga cuðen understondan ón Englisc. oððe furðum án ærendgewrit óf Lædene ón Englisc areccean. and ic wene ðætte noht monige be-giondan Humbre næren. swa feawa hiora wæron. ðæt ic furðum anne ánlepne ne mæg geðencean besuðan Temese. Ða ða ic to rice feng. gode ælmihtegum sie ðonc ðætte we nu ænigne ón stal habbað lareowa. and forðon ic ðe bebiode. ðæt þu do swa ic geliefe ðæt þu wille. ðæt þu ðe ðissa woruldþinga to ðæm geæmetige swæ þu oftost mæge. ðæt þu ðone wisdom ðe ðe god sealde ðær ðær þu hiene befæstan mæge befæste. geðenc hwelce witu ús Ða becomon for ðisse worulde. Ða Ða we hit nohwæðer ne selfe ne lufodon. ne eac oðrum monnum ne lefdon. ðone naman ænne we lufodon ðætte we cristne wæren and swiðe feawa Ða ðeawas. Ða ic Ða ðis eall gemunde. Ða gemunde ic eac hu ic geseah ær ðæm ðe hit eall forhergod wære and forbærned. hu Ða ciricean giond eall Angel-cynn stodon maðma and boca gefylde. Ond eac micel menigeo godes ðiowa. and Ða swiðe lytle fiorme ðara boca wiston. forðæm ðe hie hiora nanwuht óngiotan ne meahton. forðæm ðe hy næron ón hiora agen geðiode awritene. Swelce hie cwædon. ure yldran Ða ðe Ðas stowa ær hioldon. hie lufodon wisdom. and þurh ðone hie begeaton welan and ús læfdon. Her món mæg giet gesion hiora swæð. ac we him ne cunnon æfter spyrigean. and forðæm we habbað nú ægðer forlæten. ge ðone welan. ge ðone wisdom. forðæm ðe we noldon to ðæm spore mid ure mode ónlutan. Ða ic Ða ðis eall gemunde. Ða wundrade ic swiðe swiðe, ðara godena wiotona ðe giu wæron giond Angel-cynn. and Ða bec

ealle befullan geliornod hæfdon. ƥæt hie hiora ƥa nænne dæl noldon ƥn hiora agen geƥiode wendan. ac ic ƥa sona eft me selfum andwyrde and cwæð. hie ne wendon ƥætte æfre menn sceolden swa reccelease weorðan. and sio lar swa oðfeallan. for ƥære wilnunga hy hit forleton. and woldon ƥæt her ƥy mara wisdom ƥn lande wære. ƥy we ma geƥeoda cuðon. ƥa gemunde ic hu sio æ wæs ærest ƥn Ebreisc geƥiode funden. and eft ƥa hie Greccas geliornodon. ƥa wendon hie hie on hiora agene geƥiode ealle. and eac ealle oðre bēc. and eft Lædenware swæ same siððan hie hie geliornodon. hie hie wendon eall ðurh wise wealh-stodas ƥn hiora agen geƥiode. Ond eac ealla oðre cristne ƥioda. sumne dæl hiora ƥn hiora agen geƥiode wendon. forðy me ðyncð betre gif iow swæ ðyncð. ƥæt we eac sume bec. ƥa ðe niedbeðearfosta sien eallum monnum to wiotonne. ƥæt we ƥa ƥn ƥæt geƥiode wenden. ðe we ealle gecnawan mægen. and gedon swæ we swiðe eaðe magon. mid godes fultume. gif we ƥa stilnesse habbað. ƥætte eall sio gioguð ðe nu is ƥn Angel-cynne friora monna. ƥara ðe ƥa speda hæbben. ƥæt hie ƥæm befeolan mægen sien to liornunga oðfæste. ƥa hwile ðe hie to nanre oðerre note ne mægen. oððonne first ðe hie wel cunnen Englisc gewrit arædan. lære mon siððan furður ƥn Læden geƥiode. ƥa ðe mon furðor læran wille. and to hieran hade dón wille. ƥa ic ƥa gemunde hu sio lar Læden geƥiodes ær ðissum afeallen wæs giond Angel-cynn. and ðeah monige cuðon Englisc gewrit arædan. ƥa ƥngan ic ƥn gemang oðrum mislicum and manigfealdum bisgum ðisses kynerices ƥa boc wendan ƥn Englisc ðe is genemned ƥn Læden Pastoralis. and on



Englisc hierde-bōc. hwilum word be worde. hwilum andgit of andgite. swæ swæ ic hie geliornode æt Plegmunde minum ærcebiscepe and æt Assere minum biscepe and æt Grimbolde minum mæsse-prioste and æt Johanne minum mæsse-prioste. Siððan ic hie ða geliornod hæfde. swæ swæ ic hie forstod. and swæ ic hie andgitfullicost areccean meahte. ic hie ón Englisc awende. Ond to ælcum biscep-stole ón minum rice wille ane onsendan. and on ælcra bið án æstel. se bið on fiftægum mancessan. Ond ic bebiode on Godes naman ðæt nan món ðone æstel from ðære béc ne dó. ne ða bōc from ðæm mynstre. Uncuð hu longe ðær swæ gelærede biscepas sien. swæ swæ nu Gode ðonc wel hwær siendon. forðy ic wolde ðætte hie ealneg æt ðære stowe wæren. buton se biscep hie mit him habban wille. oððe hio hwær to læne sie. oððe hwa oðre biwrite.

*Introductory Verses.*

Þis ærendgewrit. Agostinus.  
ofer sealtne sæ. suðan brohtæ.  
iegbuendum. swa hit ærfore.  
adihtode. dryhtenes cempa.  
Rome papa. ryhtspell monig.  
Gregorius. gleawmod gindwōd.  
ðurh sefan snyttro. searoðonca hord.  
forðæm he moncynnes. mæst gestriende.  
rodra wearde. Romwara betest.  
monna mod-welegost. mærdum gefrægost.  
Siððan min on Englisc. Aelfred kyning.  
awende worda gehwelc. and me his writerum.



sende suð and norð. heht him swelcra mǣ.  
 brengan bi ðære bisene. ðæt he his biscepum.  
 sendan meahte. forðæm he his sume ðorlton.  
 ða ðe Læden spræce. læste cuðon.

*Concluding Verses.*

Dis is nu se wæterscipe. ðe us wereda God.  
 to frofre gehet. foldbuendum.  
 he cwæð ðæt he wolde. ðæt on worulde forð.  
 of ðæm innoðum. a libbendu.  
 wætru fleowen. ðe wel on hine.  
 gelifden under lyfte. is hit lytel treo.  
 ðæt ðæs wæterscipes. welsprynge is.  
 on hefonrice. ðæt is halig gæst.  
 ðonan hine hlodan. halge and gecorene.  
 siððan hine gierdon. ða ðe gode herdon.  
 ðurh halga bec. hider on eorðan.  
 geond manna mod. misselice.  
 sume hine weriað. on gewit-locan.  
 wisdomes stream. welerum gehaftað.  
 ðæt he on unnyt. ut ne to-floweð.  
 Ac se wæl wunað. on weres breostum.  
 ðurh dryhtnes giefte. diop and stille.  
 Sume hine lætað. ofer land-scare.  
 riðum to-rinnan. nis ðæt rædlic ðing.  
 gif swa hlutor wæter. hlud and undiop.  
 to-floweð æfter feldum. oð hit to fenne werð.  
 Ac hladað iow nu drincan. nu iow dryhten geaf.  
 ðæt iow Gregorius. gegiered hafað.  
 to durum iowrum. dryhtnes welle.

Fylle nu his fætels.    se ðe fæstne hider.  
 kylle brohte.    cume eft hræðe.  
 gif her ðegna hwelc.    ðyrelne kylle.  
 brohte to ðys burnan.    bete hine georne.  
 ðy læs he forsceade.    scirost wætra.  
 oððe him lifes drync.    ferloren weorðe.

*d.* PREFACE TO THE TRANSLATION OF  
 GREGORY THE GREAT'S DIALOGUES.\*

Ic Aelfred gyfendum Criste mid cynhades mæ-  
 nesse geweorðað hæbbe cuðlice ongiten.    and ðurh  
 haligra boca rædunge of gehyred.    þæt us an god swa  
 micle healicnysse woruld geðingða forgifen hæfð.    is  
 seo mæste þearf þæt we hwilon ure mod geliðian and  
 gebigian to ðam godcundum and gastlicum rihte.  
 betweenh þas eorðlican carfulnysse.    and ic forþam  
 sohte and wilnode to minum getrywum freondum þæt  
 hy me of godes bocum be haligra manna þeawum and  
 wundrum awriton þas æfterfyligendan lare.    þæt ic  
 þurh þa mynegunge and lufe getrymmed on minum  
 mode hwilum gehicge þa heofenlican þing betweenh þas  
 eorðlican gedrefednyssa.    Cuðlice we magon nu æt  
 ærestan gehyran hu se eadiga and se apostolica wer  
 Sanctus Gregorius spræc to his diacone þam wæs  
 nama Petrus.    be haligra manna þeawum and life.  
 to lare and to bysne eallum þam þe godes willan wyr-  
 ceað and lufiað.    and he be him sylfum þisum wordum  
 and þus cwæð.

\* According to MS. Hatton, 76, in the Bodleian Library, printed in  
 Wanley, Catal. p. 71.

*e.* PREFACE TO THE ANTHOLOGY FROM  
ST. AUGUSTIN'S SOLILOQUIES.\*

Gaderode me þonne rigelas and stuðan sceaftas and loh-sceaftas and hylfa to ælcum ðara tola þe ic mid wircan cuðe and boh-timbru and bolt-timbru and to ælcum þara weorca þe ic wyrcan cuðe þa wlitegostan treowo be ðam dele þe ic aberan meihte. ne com ic naþer mid anre byrðene ham. þe me ne lyste ealne þone wude ham brengan. gif ic hyre ealne aberan meihte. on ælcum treowo ic geseah hwæt hwugu þæs þe ic æt ham beþorfte. forþam ic lære ælcne ðara þe maga si and ma[nige] wæn hæbbe þæt he menige to þam ilcan wuda þar ic ðas stuðan sceaftas cearf. fetige hym þar ma and gefeðrige hys wænas mid fe-grum gerðum. þæt he mage windan manigue smicerne wah and manig ænlic hus setan and fegerne tun tim-brian. and þara and þær murge and softe mid mæge on eardian ægðer ge wintras ge sumeras. swa swa ic nu ne gyt dyde. Ac se þe me lærde. þam se wudu licode. se mæg gedon þæt ic softor eardian ægðer ge on ðisum lænan stoc-life be ðis wæge þa hwile þe ic on ðisse weorulde beo. ge eac on ðam hean† hame þe he us gehaten hefð ðurh Sanctus Augustinus. and Sanctus Gregorius. and Sanctus Jeronimus. and ðurh manege oððre halie fædras. swa ic gelyfe eac þæt he gedo for heora ealra earnunge ægðer ge ðisne

\* MS. Cotton., Vitellius A. 15, fol. 1, sec. XII.: this Manuscript is in many places much injured.

† The Manuscript copy is altered to "hecan."

weig gelimfulran gedō ðonne he ær ðissum wæs. ge huru mines modes eagan to ðam ongelichte þæt ic mage rihtne weig aredian to ðam ecan hame and to ðam ecan are and to þære ecan reste þe us gehaten is ðurh ða halgan fæderas. sie swa.

Nis hit nan wundor þeah man swylce on timber gewirce and eac on þa[ere ut]lade and eac on þære bytlinge. Ac ælcne man lyst. siððan he ænig cotlyf on his hlafordes læne myd his fultume getimbred hæfð. þæt he hine mote hwilum þar on gerestan. and huntigan. and fuglian. and fiscian. and his on gehwilce wisan to þære lænan tilian ægþær ge on se ge on lande oð oð þone fyrst þe he bocland and æce yrfe þurh his hlafordes miltse geearnige. Swa gedo se wilega gidfola se þe egðer wilt ge þissa lænena stoc-life ge þara ecena hama. Se þe ægðer gescop and ægðeres wilt. forgife me þæt me to ægðrum onhagige. ge her nytwyrde to beonne ge huru ðider to cumane.

### *f.* ALFRED'S WILL.\*

Ic Aelfred cingc, mid godes gife and mid geþeah-tunge Aeðeredes ercebisceopes and ealra Westseaxena witena gewitnesse, smeade ymbe mīnre sáwle þearfe, and ymbe mīn yrfe ðæt me god and mīne ylðran forgeafon, and ymbe ðæt yrfe ðæt Aðulf cingc, mīn fæder, ús þrim gebróðrum becwæð, Aðelbolde and Aeðerede and me, and swylc úre swylce lengest wære, ðæt se fenge tó eallum. Ac hit gelamp ðæt Aeðelbold gefór, and wyt Aeðered, mid ealra Westseaxena witena ge-

\* Kemble, "Cod. Dipl. Ævi Sax.," N. 314.

witnesse, uncerne dæl oð-fæstan Aedelbyrhte cinge, uncrum mæge; on ða gerædene ðe he hit eft gedyde unc swā gewylde swā hit ðā wæs, ðā wit him oðfæstan, and he ðā swā dyde, ge ðæt yrfe, ge ðæt he mid uncre gemānan begeat, and ðæt he sylf gestrynde. Ðā hit swā gelamp ðæt Aedred tō feng, ðā bæd ie hine, beforan úrum witum eallum, ðæt wyt ðæt yrfe geðældon, and he me ágeafe mīnne dæl. Ðā sæde he me, ðæt he náht eāðe ne mihte tōdælan, forðon he hæfde ful oft ær ongefangen: and he cwæð ðæs ðe he on uncrum gemānan gebrūce and gestrynde, æfter his dæge he nānum menn sel ne úðe ðonne me: and ic ðæs ðā wæs wel gefafa. Ae hit gelamp ðæt we ealle on hædenum folce gebrocude wæron; ðā spræce wyt ymbe unere bearn, ðæt hy sumre āre beþorftan, sælde une on ðām brocum swā une sælde: ðā wæron we on gemōte æt Swīnbeorgum; ðā gecwædon wit on Westseaxena witena gewitnesse; ðæt swāðer uncer leng wære, ðæt he geúðe óðres bearnum ðāra landa ðe wyt sylfe begeaton, and ðara landa ðe unc Aðulf cinge forgeaf be Aedelbolde lifendum, būtan ðām ðe he ús þrim gebróðrum gecwæð: and ðæs uneor ægðer óðrum his wedd sealde, swāðer uneer leng lifede, ðæt se fenge ægðer ge tō lande ge to mādnum and tō eallum his æhtum, butan ðam dæle ðe uncer gehwæðer his bearnum becwæð. Ac hit gelamp ðæt Aedred cinge gefōr; ðā ne eyððe me nān mann nān yrfe-gewrit, né nāne gewitnesse, ðæt hit ænig oðer wære būtan swā wit on gewitnesse ær gecwædon. Ðā gehyrde we nū manegu yrfegeßlitu; nū ðā lædde ie Adußes cinges yrfe-gewrit on úre gemót æt Langandene and hit man árædde beforan eallum West-

seaxena witum. Ðá hit áráed wæs, ðá bæd ic hy ealle, for mīnre lufan, and him mīn wedd beád ðæt ic hyra næfre nænne ne oncúðe forðon ðe hy on riht spræcon, and ðæt hyra nán ne wandode nē for mīnan lufan nē for mīnum ege, ðæt hy ðæt folcriht árehton; ðylæs ænig man cweðe, ðæt ic mīne mægchild, oððe yldran oððe gingran, mid wó fordēmdre. and hy ðá ealle tó rihte gerehton and cwædon, ðæt hy nán rihtre riht gepencan ne mihtan, nē on ðám yrfe-gewrite gehyran: nū hit eall ágán is ðæron oð ðīne hand: ðonne ðú hit becweðe and sylle swá gesibre handa swá fremdre, swáðer ðe leófre sy: and hī ealle me ðæs hyra wedd sealdon and hyra handsetene, ðæt be hyra life hit nænig man næfre ne onwende on nāne óðre wīsan, bútan swá swá ic hit sylf gecweðe æt ðám nyhstan dæge.

Ic Aelfred Westseaxena cingc, mid godes gife and mid ðisse gewitnesse, gecweðe hū ic ymbe mīn yrfe wille æfter mīnum dæge. Aerost ic an Eádwearde mīnum yldran suna, ðæs landes æt Strætneát on Triconscire and Heortingtūnes, and ða bócland ealle ðe Leófheáh hylt, and ðæt land æt Carumtūne, and æt Cylfantūne, and æt Burnhamme and æt Wedmór; and ic eom fyrmdig tó ðám hiwum æt Ceodre ðæt hy hine ceósan on ða gerád ðe we, ær gecweden hæfdon, mid ðam lande æt Ciwtūne, and ðám ðe ðærtó hyrað; and ic him an ðæs landes æt Cantuctūne, and æt Bedewindan, and æt Pefesigge, and Hysseburnan, and æt Sūttūne, and æt Leódredan, and æt Aweltūne. And ealle ða bócland ðe ic on Cent hæbbe, and æt ðám nyðeran Hysseburnan, and æt Cyseldene, ágyfe man intó Wintanceastre, on ða

gerād ðe hit mīn fæder ær gecwæð, and ðæt mīn sundorfeoh ðæt ic Ecgulfe oðfæste on ðām neoðeran Hysseburnan. And ðām gingran mīnan suna ðæt land æt Ederingtūne, and ðæt æt Dene, and ðæt æt Meone, and ðæt æt Ambresbyrig, and æt Deone, and æt Stureminster, and æt Gifle, and æt Cruærn, and æt Hwitancyrican, and æt Axanmúðan, and æt Branecescumbe, and æt Columtūne, and æt Twyfyrd, and æt Mylenburnan, and æt Exanmynster, and æt Sūðeswyrðe, and æt Liwtūne, and ða land ðe ðær tō hyran, ðæt synt ealle ðe ic on Wealcynne hæbbe bûtan Triconscire. And mīnre yldstan dēhter ðænne hām æt Welewe, and ðære medemestan æt Clearan, and æt Cendefer; and ðære gingestan ðone hām æt Welig, and æt Aescetune, and æt Cippenhamme. And Aedelme, mīnes brōðer suna, ðone hām æt Ealdingburnan, and æt Cumtūne, and æt Crundellān, and æt Beadingum, and æt Beadingahamme, and æt Burnhām, and æt Ðunresfelda, and æt Aescengum; and Aedelwolde, mīnes brōðor suna, ðone hām æt Godelmingum, and æt Gyldeforda, and æt Stæningum; and Osferðe mīnum mæge, ðone hām æt Becanlea, and æt Hryðerānfelda, and æt Diccelingum, and æt Sūðtūne, and æt Lullingmynster, and æt Angemæringtun, and æt Felhhamme, and ða land ðe ðær tō hyran. And Ealhswīðe ðone hām æt Lambburnan, and æt Waneting, and æt Eðandūne. And mīnum twām sunum ān þusend punda, ægðrum fīf hund punda; and mīnre yldstan dēhter, and ðære medemestan, and ðære gingstran, and Ealhswīðe, him feowrum, feower hund punda, ælcum ān hund punda; and mīnra ealdormanna ælcum ān hund

mangcusa, and Aeðelme, and Aeðelwolde, and Osferðe, eác swá; and Aeðerede ealdormenn án sweord on hund teontigum mancusum; and ðám mannum ðe me folgiað, ðe ic nú on eástertíðum feoh sealde, twá hund punda ágyfe man him, and dæle man him betweoh, ælcum swá him tó gebyrian wille, æfter ðære wísan ðe ic him nú dælde; and ðam ercebisceope. c. mancusa, and Esne bisceope, and Wærferðe bisceope, and ðam æt Scireburnan. Eác swá gedæle for me and for mīnne fæder, and for ða frynd ðe he fore þingode and ic fore þingie, twá hund punda, fiftig mæssepreostum ofer eall mīn ríce, fiftig earmum godes þeowum, fiftig earmum þearfum, fiftig tó ðære cyrican ðe ic æt reste; and ic nāt nāht gewislice hwæðer ðæs feos swá micel is, nē ic nāt ðeáh his mære sy; bútan swá ic wéne. Gif hit mære sy, beó hit him eallum gemæne ðe ic feoh becwedon hæbbe; and ic wille ðæt mīne ealdormenn and mīne þenigmenn ðær ealle mid syndan, and ðis ðūs gedælan. Ðonne hæfde ic ær on óðre wísan áwriten ymbe mīn yrfe, ðá ic hæfde mære feoh and má maga, and hæfde monegum mannum ða gewritu oðfæst, and on ðás ylcan gewitnesse hy wæron áwritene; ðonne hæbbe ic nú forbærned ða ealdan ðe ic geáhsian mihte. Gyf hyra hwylc funden bið, ne forstent ðæt nāht; forðam ic wille ðæt hit nú ðūs sy mid godes fultume. And ic wille ða menn ðe ða land habbað, ða word gelæstan ðe on mīnes fæder yrfe-gewrite standað, swá swá hy fyrrest magon: and ic wille gif ic ænigum menn ænig feoh unleánod hæbbe, ðæt mīne magas ðæt huru geleánian. And ic wille ða menn ðe ic mīne bócland becweden hæbbe,



Ðæt hy hit ne ásyllan of mínum cynne ofer heora  
 dæg; ac ic wille [ofer] hyra dæg Ðæt hit gange on  
 Ða nyhstan hand me bútan hyra hwylc bearn hæbbe;  
 Ðonne is me leófast Ðæt hit gange on Ðæt strynde  
 on Ða wæpned healfe, Ða hwíle Ðe ænig Ðæs wyrðe  
 sy. Mín yldra fæder hæfde gecweden his land on  
 Ða sperehealfe, næs on Ða spinlhealfe; Ðonne, gif  
 ic gesealde ænigre wífhandas Ðæt he gestrynde, Ðonne  
 forgyldan míne magas, and gif hy hit be Ðan libben-  
 dan habban wyllan; gif hit elles sy, gange hit ofer  
 hyra dæg swá swá we ær gecweden hæfdon: forðon  
 ic cweðe, Ðæt hí hit gyldan, forðon hy foð to mínum  
 Ðe ic syllan mót swá wífhandas swá wæpnedhandas  
 swáðer ic wylle. And ic bidde on godes naman and  
 on his háligra Ðæt mínra maga nán né yrfewearda,  
 ne geswence nán nænig cyrelif Ðára Ðe ic foregeald,  
 and me Westseaxena wítan tó rihte gerehton, Ðæt  
 ic hí mót lætan swá freo swá þeówe, swáðer ic wille;  
 ac ic, for godes lufan and for mínre sáwle þearfe,  
 wylle Ðæt hy syn heora freolses wyrðe and hyra cyres.  
 And ic on godes lifendes naman beóde Ðæt hy nán  
 man ne brocie, né mid feos mánunge, né mid næni-  
 gum þingum, Ðæt hy ne mótan ceósan swylcne mann  
 swylce hy wyllan. And ic wylle Ðæt man ágyfe Ðám  
 hiwum æt Domrahamme hyra landbéc and hyra freols,  
 swylce hand tó ceósenne swylce him leófast sy, for me  
 and for Aelflæde, and for Ða frynd Ðe heó fore þingode  
 and ic fore þingic. And séc man eác on cwicum  
 ceápe ymbe mínre sáwle þearfe, swá hit beón mæge,  
 and swá hit eác gerysne sy, and swá ge me forgyfan  
 wyllan.

II.



ALFRED'S JEWEL.

# III.

## A REGISTER

OF THE

## HISTORY OF WESSEX,

FROM THE YEAR 838 TO THE YEAR 901.

Year.	Particular period.	Place of Residence.	Facts.
838			Death of King Egberht.
"		On the Stour.	King Athelwulf.
839		Hamton.	King Athelwulf.
845		On Weg.	King Athelwulf.
847		Canterbury.	King Athelwulf.
849		Wantage.	Birth of Alfred.
852			Battle of Aclea.
853	Easter. (April 4.)	Chippenham.	Burhred of Mercia marries Athelswith.
"			Alfred's first journey to Rome.
854		Wilton.	King Athelwulf.
855			Athelwulf and Alfred's journey to Rome.
856	July.	France.	Athelwulf's betrothal with Judith.
"	October 1.	Verberie.	Marriage with Judith.
858	January 13.		King Athelwulf's death.
860	July (?)		King Athelbald's death.
861			Judith returns to France.
"			Alfred learns to read.

Year.	Particular period.	Place of Residence.	Facts.
862	July 2.		Death of Swithun, Bishop of Winchester.
866	February (?)		Death of King Athelberht.
867	November 1.		Arrival of Ingvar and Ubba.
"			Death of Ealhstan, Bishop of Sherburne.
868	March 21.		Battle of York.
"			Alfred marries Ealhswith.
"			Battle before Nottingham.
869	September 21.		Battle of Kesteven.
870	November 20.		Death of Eadmund, King of East-Anglia.
871	January (?)		The Danes take Reading.
"	3 days afterwards.		Fight of Englafeld.
"			Battle before Reading.
"	4 days afterwards.		Battle of Ascesdume.
"	14 days afterwards.		Battle of Basing.
"			Meeting at Swinbeorh.
"	2 months afterwards.		Battle of Merton.
"	April 23.		Death of King Athelred.
"	May.		Battle of Wiltun.
872	Autumn.		The Danes conclude a Treaty with Burhred of Mercia.
"			Werfrith, Bp. of Worcester.
873			Fall of the Kingdom of Mercia.
874		Rome.	Death of King Burhred.
875			Division of the Danish Forces.
"			Sea-fight in the Channel.
876			The Danes take Warham.

Year.	Particular period.	Place of Residence.	Facts.
877			The Danes proceed to Exeter.
"	August.		Sea-fight.
878			The Danes leave Exeter.
"			They take Chippenham.
"			Defence of the fortress of Cynwith, in Devonshire.
"			Alfred in Somerset.
"	Easter.	Athelney.	Fortifies himself.
"	(March 23.)		
"	May 5-12.		Marehesto Eegberhtes-stan.
"			Battle of Athandune.
"	14 days afterwards.		Chippenham taken.
"	July.		Treaty of Wedmor.
"	12 days afterwards.		Guthorm-Athelstan leaves Wedmor.
879			Departure of the Danes.
"			Hasting at Fulham.
"			Denewulf, Bishop of Winchester.
882			Sea-fight.
883			Embassy to Rome and the East.
884		Dene.	Asser appears at Alfred's Court.
885	Summer.		Danes land near Roehester.
"			Fight at the mouth of the Stour.
"	November 11.	Leonaforð.	Alfred begins his literary labours.
886			London rebuilt and confided to Athelred.
887			Athelhelm at the head of an Embassy to Rome.

Year.	Particular period.	Place of Residence.	Facts.
888			Beocca at the head of an Embassy to Rome.
"		Padua.	Death of Queen Athelswith.
890			Beornhelm at the head of an Embassy to Rome.
"			Death of King Guthorm-Athelstan.
891	September 1.		Battle near Louvain-on-the-Dyle.
892			Danes land in Kent.
894	East <sup>r</sup> (Mar. 31).		Danes proceed to Berkshire.
"			Battle of Farnham.
"	August 24.	York.	Death of Guthred of Northumbria.
"			Danes in Devonshire.
"			Storming of Benfleet.
"			Hasting besieged in Buttington.
"			Passes the winter near Chester, and in Wales.
895			Wales laid waste.
"			Return to Essex.
896			Fortifications on the Lea.
"			The Danes proceed to Bridgenorth.
"			Witenagemot at Gloucester.
"			The Danes dispersed.
897			Sea-fight on the coast of Devonshire.
"	Summer.	Winchester.	Alfred on the coast.
898		Wulfamere.	Alfred's meeting with Athelred and his bishops.
899		Celchyth.	Meeting with the same.
901	October 28.		Death of King Alfred.









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